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# CUBAN REFUGEES IN ATLANTA: 1950-1980

by

CHARLOTTE A BAYALA

Under the Direction of Clifford M Kuhn

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the lives of Cuban refugees who entered Atlanta, Georgia between 1950 and 1980. It explores early trans-national ties between the two areas, and how Cuban refugees relied on this relationship when they left the island. It shows the process they went through from finding aid and shelter to becoming a strong active community. It explains the role religious institutions had in settling refugees and shows how the state had to work to become equipped to provide resources to a large influx of Spanish-speakers. Through this thesis one will learn of the beginnings of an important Latino community in Atlanta and how its formation prepared the city for larger immigrant groups that would arrive later.

INDEX WORDS: Cuban Refugees, Cubans, Refugees, Exiles, Atlanta, Georgia, Ethnic History, Immigrants, Religion, Community Building, Latino, Hispanic, Castro, Cuban Revolution

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by

CHARLOTTE A BAYALA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2006

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2006

CUBAN REFUGEES IN ATLANTA: 1950-1980

by

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Baby girl, mommy is done. It's time to play!

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## Introduction

*The personal history of each Cuban living in the U.S. is mostly unknown, unspoken, and often lies buried under a thick layer of inaccurate assumptions.*

-Eduardo Aparicio<sup>1</sup>

Ruben and Margarita Rodriguez fell in love as teenagers in Havana, Cuba during the late 1950s but soon found themselves separated by Castroism and an ocean. Ruben and his family were fortunate enough to be able to leave Cuba during the beginning of the Castro regime; however, Margarita was not as fortunate. The couple did not lose hope, and in time Margarita was able to go to Spain by ship with nothing but five dollars. Margarita could not leave for the United States without a sponsor or the money to travel there. Ruben, now in Atlanta, became desperate and, with his family, made the contacts needed to be successful in getting Margarita to him. The two were married ten days after she arrived. The preparations for the day they thought would never happen were arranged by friends of Ruben's family, individual members of the small Cuban refugee community in Atlanta, and cultural clubs such as the Pan American Club and the Circulo Hispano Americano. Even strangers sent them presents. The community came together on the day of the wedding to see this young couple get married. For them this union symbolized not only the plight of all refugees but also the "triumph of love over Castro and the restrictions of his Communist-dominated regime."<sup>2</sup> The ceremony was held in Spanish in a Catholic Church, the first of what would be many such ceremonies to be held in the city. When asked if they would like to return to Cuba, Margarita responded that she would. However Ruben

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Behar, ed. *Bridges to Cuba*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), pg. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Barnwell, "Love Wins Out Over Castro" *Atlanta Journal Magazine*. 11 June 1961, p. 7.



added that she would also like to bring her family to the United States. They started a new life that day, in a new world, filled with hopes and aspirations.

Margarita and Ruben were not the first Cuban refugees to come to Atlanta and would not be the last. Thousands of others would also find themselves there. Ruben and Margarita's story of love conquering all for two newcomers in the city was covered by the local press. However, their broader lives, and the lives of others like them, have not been the subject of any local studies or scholarship. How did they create a life and a community in Atlanta and what kind of process did they go through to do so?

### ***Background and Purpose of the Study***

For the three decades, between the late 1950s into the 1980s, Cubans predominated among Latino groups in Atlanta. Cubans comprised the largest Latino subgroup in 1975.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the 1980's Cubans made up 53 percent of the Hispanic population followed by South Americans (17%) and Mexicans (11%).<sup>4</sup> Today, Cubans are the third largest Latino group in the metro area. In 1997 they totaled 6,000, half the number of Puerto Ricans and 94,000 less than the total number of Mexicans.<sup>5</sup> The recent massive influx of Latinos from Central America and Mexico to the Atlanta area over the past decade has overshadowed the importance of the history of the Cuban community of the area.

The Cuban refugee experience is important in understanding how Atlanta was shaped into the multicultural city it now prides itself in being. The process the city went through in dealing with its new inhabitants allowed it to be better prepared to deal with an emerging immigrant population of a larger scale that would follow Cuban refugees. The disorganization

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<sup>3</sup> C.E Hill, "Adaptation in Public and Private Behavior of Ethnic Groups in an American Urban Setting," *Urban Anthropology* 4 (1975): 333-347.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Urban Research and Service, College of Urban Life. *The Assessment of Special Service Needs Among the Hispanic Population of the Atlanta Area* (Atlanta: Georgia State University, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Center for Applied Research in Anthropology. *1997 Demographics for Recent Immigrants/ Refugees in Metro Atlanta* (Atlanta: Georgia State University, 2000).

and lack of local resources that Cubans first experienced when they first began arriving in the city would have major consequences with the larger waves of Cubans and Central Americans who entered Atlanta in the 1980s. Through trial and error, a support network was devised over a period of twenty years that would prepare Atlanta to provide for newcomers, especially Latinos. Before Cuban refugees began to arrive in Georgia in 1959, most aid and welfare organizations did not have bilingual staff. Churches and private organizations to which the exiles were attracted had small committees or groups of members that were available for general aid, such as the Catholic Church's St Vincent DePaul Society. However, they were not organized to help people on a larger scale. The Cuban refugee experience changed this. By 1980 the city had evolved significantly in terms of being able to provide for immigrants, especially Spanish speakers.

There are many aspects of the life and experiences of an exile to be told. This project will show how refugees came to find themselves in Atlanta after Castro's Revolution. It will analyze the attraction the city had for them and why they chose to travel to an area that, at that time, was not as accessible as cities like Miami and New York.

This thesis will explain the hardships they had to overcome in leaving the island and making Atlanta their new home. Cubans in Atlanta have a great oral tradition that, until this thesis, had largely been untapped. Through some of their stories, one is able to understand what refugees went through when coming to terms with their situation. Stories of their own experiences in leaving Cuba and living in Atlanta put a human perspective on what could easily be a study of census numbers and city statistics. Refugees take an active role in this work just as they did in making Georgia their home.

Cubans had to go through a process of acclimation before they would find themselves settled. They were first helped by friends and family when entering the city and later were helped by religious aid societies and city offices. This project will show how Cubans quickly worked to support themselves and their families. They depended on each other and through this interdependency a small network was created through which they formed a communal identity. As this sense of community strengthened, the refugees started to take on issues that affected them. They became involved in aid societies that continued to provide aid to new refugees. The counter-revolutionary movement became important to many as others took an active role in improving local conditions for new refugees. Many opened up businesses that catered to the specific needs of the refugees. The Cuban refugee had to re-invent himself or herself not only by learning to live in a different country but in forming a new sense of self, a new identity as a Cuban American.

Atlanta also needed to readjust before it became a city able to meet the needs of immigrants. It was not prepared for the effect the Cuban Revolution would have or the influx of refugees it would cause. This work will show that Atlanta learned how to meet those needs. Local churches worked with the refugees to help them find what they needed until they established their households and found jobs. Private groups and individuals made up a big part of the aid that was provided and shaped many changes that would later benefit new immigrants. City officials realized, in time, that they needed to make their services accessible to Spanish speakers and instituted reforms to do so. Through this process Atlanta also created a new identity for itself - that of a multi cultural city.

The written history of Atlanta is very rich; however, it is very limited in its treatment of its immigrant communities. There is much written about race relations in Atlanta, as well as its

history of African Americans. There is an abundance of political and labor history as well. However, there is not a large concentration of work on the history of its immigrant population. This absence has been noticed by some now that immigration has become the “hot topic” of the times. Many local libraries are beginning to work on collecting and archiving immigrant information and as studies by organizations such as the Georgia Board of Regents have identified the Latino community as an untapped resource. There have been a couple of theses that are largely outdated and very cursory studies of the Latino community here in Georgia and metro Atlanta. The latest study done on the Cuban community was written in 1976 as a thesis which relied solely on the 1960 and 1970 United States Census as its primary resource. This work is more a sociological study of the acculturation and assimilation of the group and the author leaves the history of the community to future studies, which in the past twenty years have not been done.

### ***Ethnic History Scholarship***

There is a wide range of scholarship on Cuban refugees and Cuban Americans. There are many works that study the Cuban refugee experience in major cities of the United States as well as the formation of a Cuban-American identity. Two authors,<sup>6</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, have done sociological studies on the Cuban populations of Miami and other areas of the United States and have developed important social theories based on the Cuban exile

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of the recent studies see: Felix Roberto Masud- Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959-1995*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1996; Jose A Cobas and Jorge Duany. *Cubans in Puerto Rico: Ethnic Economy and Cultural Identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997; Gustavo Firmat Perez. *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994; Maria de los Angeles Torres. *In the Land of Mirros: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999; Maria Cristina Garcia, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1996. Miguel Gonzales-Pando. *The Cuban Americans*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998.

experience.<sup>7</sup> In Immigrant America they show that Cubans can not be categorized as a group but that their refugee experience was shaped by their lives in Cuba, when they left the island and the reasons for which they left. They show that each immigrant as well as each ethnic group has a different response to their immigration to the United States which directly relates to how they are accepted by Americans. The authors explain that there is a merging of cultures as immigrants spend more time in their host country and that the support immigrants gain from a community that shares their language and culture is important.

The scholarship on the process of identity-formation among immigrants in the United States has steadily evolved ever since the first theories of assimilation were made in Chicago at the beginning of the last century. These first groups of scholars based their work on their studies of European immigrant groups and saw assimilation as inevitable and irreversible. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole argued that in order for them to “successfully learn the new way of life necessary for full acceptance” ethnic groups were “unlearning” their “inferior”<sup>8</sup> cultural traits. The “prevalent belief” at the time was “that acculturation and assimilation followed a downward and straight line trend that would inevitably end with the eventual total disappearance of all traces of ethnicity after several native-born generations.”<sup>9</sup>

The theory of the American melting pot was directly challenged in the 1950s by a group who showed that there was no straight assimilation of ethnic cultures and assimilatory theories of ethnic groups could not be done on a group level but on an individual level. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan argued that American culture was anything but a melting pot. In their work

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<sup>7</sup> Alejandro Portes, and Ruben G. Runbaut. *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Portes, Alejandro and Robert L. Bach, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (New Haven, 1945), 285.

<sup>9</sup> Eliot Barkan, “Race, Religion and Nationality in American Society: A Model of Ethnicity.” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, (Winter 1995).

*Beyond the Melting Pot* they state that “the powerful assimilatory influences of American society operate on all who come into it. America’s ethnic groups were peoples who had been recreated as something new.”<sup>10</sup> Yet given the nature of American society, there was not an assimilation of the immigrant groups.<sup>11</sup> Milton Gordon also did not see the American melting pot. He believed that acculturation could be reached without other forms of assimilation and that one could become acculturated and stay there indefinitely.<sup>12</sup>

In the following years historians continued to debate on whether or not assimilation was achievable or important. Elliott Barkan explains that a discussion began “centered on whether pluralism had entirely prevailed, and if so, which kind, whether assimilation was accelerating or had ‘lost momentum’ and whether the emphasis was to be on individuals or on groups.”<sup>13</sup> Scholars were now moving away from the Straight Line assimilatory theories in which assimilation was seen as a process that was achieved in generational steps and moving towards what Herbert Gans has labeled the “Bumpy Line” theory of assimilation. The bumps represent the “various kinds of adaptations to changing circumstances and with the line having no predictable end.”<sup>14</sup>

Elliott Barkan created his own theory incorporating Gans’ “Bumpy Line” theory and developed a six-stage model of assimilation. The premise of his model was “that in immigrant receiving nations there has been no one pattern, no one cycle, no one outcome that uniformly encompasses all ethnic experiences.” These six stages “represent concurrent and overlapping

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<sup>10</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negro, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970), 12-14.

<sup>11</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negro, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970. 12-14.

<sup>12</sup> Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 70-82.

<sup>13</sup> Barkan, “Race, Religion and Nationality in American Society.” 43.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Gans, “Comment: Ethnic Invention and Acculturation a Bumpy Line Approach,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, (Fall 1992): 47.

experiences in most ethnic communities.”<sup>15</sup> In order to change from one stage to the next, Barkan applies factors that are present and whose changes constitute the movement from one stage to the next. Through his model he proves that the immigrant experience in the United States is just as varied as the people themselves.

It is difficult to fit the Atlantan Cuban refugee into any of these assimilation theories, and this study may later become part of a new understanding of the ethnic experience and identity formation in the United States. This is not a study in ethnicity and rates of assimilation are not observed; however, throughout this work it is evident that the refugees are constantly facing situations that lead them to renegotiate their sense of self. To become Cuban American meant something different for each Cuban. Some placed the emphasis more on the Cuban while others more on the American aspect. However, all refugees had to work on a new identity while coming to terms with the fact that going back to Cuba was not going to be the viable option they thought it would.

One work that is helpful in understanding Cubans and how they identified as being so is *On Becoming Cuban* by Louis A. Pérez Jr. Pérez shows that after the Spanish American War, North American culture greatly influenced the Cuban psyche. He explains that with the U.S. occupation came improvements on the island and a dependence on the sugar industry that created a market for North American goods in Cuba. Through the influence of North American film, music, style and products there soon emerged a blur between the line that separated what was considered Cuban and what was American. Cubans became entranced with the lure of American society. They followed American styles, took on Americanized names, and adopted English

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<sup>15</sup> Barkan, “Race Religion and Nationality in American Society.”

words. It could be said that for a time Cubans in Cuba were more American than they were when they found refuge in the United States decades later.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Chapter Organization***

The first chapter of this work will show that refugees came in different waves and did not constitute one cohesive group. It will show that Cubans already had a history of traveling to Atlanta. Some went to school in the city while others traveled there for business or on vacations. Through this travel, a small group of Cubans became very familiar with the city, a familiarity that would lead them to choose Atlanta when looking for a place to live. This chapter will explain the hardships faced by the Cubans into leaving the island and what they had to leave behind.

The second chapter will deal with the importance of the church in the lives of the Cubans. The Catholic Church formed a special committee that lasted ten years and whose sole concern was that of the resettlement of the Cubans in the city.<sup>17</sup> Even though Cubans were predominantly Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches also worked to help with the refugees. In fact the first “wedding party following a Nuptial Mass” was given by Baptists and Presbyterians.<sup>18</sup> This chapter will emphasize the church's role in the life of the refugee as an institution that did not try to “Americanize” them but empowered them to become an important part of the aid effort in the city.

The third chapter will discuss the formation of community leaders and groups as well as the formation of a new Cuban-American identity. First the history of community groups will be

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<sup>16</sup> Louis A Perez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence, *Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Assembly Room, October 18, 1961 to Discuss Cuban Refugee Situation-7:30 pm*, Folder: Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971, Atlanta Archdiocese Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>18</sup> Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence, *Summary of Cuban Refugees Activities In Atlanta*, Folder: Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971, Atlanta Archdiocese Archive, Atlanta.



presented in order to show that the community began to create ways in which they could provide assistance to their fellow members as well as create ways in which they could celebrate and hold on to their culture. The idea of *cubanismo* was very important to the Cuban exile community. The first generations wanted to make sure that their children would remember what it meant to be Cuban, hold on to their parent language, and learn the history of the island so that they would be ready for a return to the homeland. As members of the community became more adapted they also became more involved in local politics. The community groups helped reinforce ethnicity as well as provide support for social, economic and educational advancement. They also led to a rise in community activism that would bring about a change in city government policy and services available for Spanish speakers by adding new programs and hiring bilingual staff. These changes would prove to be essential when the major influx of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries began in the 1980s.

It is true that the rate of assimilation and acculturation of the Cubans in Atlanta can be an interesting endeavor; however, a study of it at this time is not as essential as the history of the people itself. Therefore, this study is a history of the Cuban community just as it is a history of Atlanta. The Cuban Atlantan experience is one that could be the subject of several studies as there is a wealth of information in the city, much of which is still in the heads and hands of former refugees and their families still living in the area. The influx of Cubans as well as Central and South Americans in the 1980s creates a new chapter in Atlanta history and subsequently was not used for this study. Cubans have a history that dates back to the 1800s. They came to the area for many different reasons; for many, businesses brought them to Atlanta and its surrounding areas and is the subject of a study currently being researched. This work was not intended to be

an all encompassing work on the history of Cubans in Atlanta but more an answer to why there is a sizable community in the area and how they evolved into Cuban Atlantans.

### *The Arrival*

On January 1, 1959, Fulgencio Batista and a group of his supporters left Cuba under cover of night. Fidel Castro's rise to power divided Cubans into two groups: those who saw the regime change as hope for their future and those who felt they had no choice but to find refuge in other countries. For some Cubans, this change in power created an immediate danger for them and their families. They soon followed Batista's path to the United States, taking most of their assets with them. A good majority of Cubans did not immediately see this change in power as a threat but welcomed the prospect of the future Castro would provide them. However, when Castro's new government took form, reforms were instituted that largely disenfranchised Cubans who were mostly white upper and middle-class. When Castro announced his aims for a socialist government, the flood of Cubans leaving the island had already begun.

Cubans sought refuge in many different areas of the United States during this time and a significant group of Cubans found their way to Atlanta. At the time of the refugees' arrival to the city, there was neither a large group of Cubans nor a large Latino group from any other country. The refugees gave cause for a significant change in the city's social services that other Latino groups would benefit from years later.

### *Historic Patterns of Travel and Trans-National Ties*

Refugees who traveled to Atlanta after 1960 were not the first Cubans to the area; rather, they continued a century-long relationship between the people of Cuba and Georgia. Their travel to Atlanta had been fluid, and the number of Cubans living there at any time fluctuated. Cuban

children traveled to the area to attend local schools as well as functions, events, and vacations with their families. Cubans also traveled there for business. Some enjoyed the city and moved their families there, creating a small semi-permanent group of families by 1959.

Atlantans also had a history of traveling to Cuba. They made their way to the island through their participation in wars, business ventures, and vacations. In 1898 Atlantans participated in the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Some soldiers stayed on the island after the war, others traveled back frequently to reminisce and visit old friends. Businessmen followed the nationwide trend of doing business with Cuba in the early 1900s. By 1924, United States companies owned 50% of the sugar industry, purchased 75% of Cuban exports, and had investments totaling \$1.2 billion.<sup>19</sup>

Often, business ventures were intertwined with social and religious reform. Business and religious prospects took the prominent Candler family to Cuba where they founded Candler College. In 1898 Warren Candler became the Methodist bishop for the North Georgia district and was given charge of starting a mission in Cuba. His brother Asa Candler had become owner of the Coca-Cola Company and wanted to convert new consumers to his product. In Cuba, the two brothers worked to win new converts “for the greatest of America’s products – Christ and Coca Cola.” In the process they helped create a relationship between Cuba and Atlanta’s business and religious community and, along with other such business ventures, laid the groundwork for the exportation of the North American culture of consumption.<sup>20</sup>

Cuba became a popular vacation destination for the Atlanta elite.<sup>21</sup> In 1927, resorts in Cuba marketed the island to Atlantans through pamphlets and advertisements as an “enchanting

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<sup>19</sup> One Atlantan was Augustus Washington York from nearby Marietta. He was stationed at Chickamauga before leaving for Cuba. He stayed to live in Cuba after the war and his descendants went back to Atlanta during the Revolution. “History of the Cuban Club of Atlanta,” Cuban Club of Atlanta Private Papers, Atlanta, Ga. “Cubans, Their History and Culture” Refugee Fact Sheet Series No 12, The Refugee Service Center, Washington DC, 1996, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Hall, “Case Study: Coca-Cola and Methodism.” *Southern Exposure* (Fall 1977), 98-101.

<sup>21</sup> Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn* (NY: Penguin Books. 1997), 324.

old world city” embodying “spirit of hospitality in keeping with the traditions for which Cuba is so justly famed.”<sup>22</sup> Cuban businessmen advertised their island as “not far away, not too expensive... Here is mental rejuvenation for the American business man; a radical change from the routine... an opportunity to forget business, with the comfortable knowledge that if need be, a phone call can bring him quickly back to his desk. Plan now to visit Cuba, the ultimate in winter travel!”<sup>23</sup>

This historical pattern of travel between the two areas is significant. Importantly, Cubans’ prior contact with Atlanta brought them back when looking for refuge. These refugees were no different than those who settled in other cities at the time, such as Miami. Most of the first wave of exiles chose Atlanta because they, or someone they knew, had been to the city or knew someone who had ties to it.

One of the largest draws of Cubans to Atlanta was education. Young students were drawn to schools in the area, some of which actively recruited Cuban students. One such school was Georgia Military Academy. Its founder, Colonel John Charles Woodward, developed business relationships with the Cuban elite that also worked to promote his academy.

Colonel Woodward began the Georgia Military Academy in 1900 at the request of the citizens of College Park, a new suburb of Atlanta.<sup>24</sup> Georgia Military Academy quickly became popular among the Atlanta elite. Woodward’s curriculum taught that, “the values of the military training are beyond computation from any point of view. It develops self reliance, a manly and independent nature, easy and graceful form and carriage, business elements of punctuality and

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<sup>22</sup> “Cuban Good Will Tour” 1927, Pamphlet, Atlanta History Center Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Russell A Zaring, “They Call it the Game of War. But it Really is the Game of Life: John Charles Woodward and Georgia Military Academy.” *Atlanta History*. Vol XLIV (Spring 2000): 57.

system, personal neatness, military etiquette, polished and refined manners . . .”<sup>25</sup> In 1902, he added Spanish instruction to his curriculum and hired an instructor from the Philippines.

Woodward believed that, “so intimate have become our relationships with Spanish-speaking peoples that it is almost necessary that men who will be connected with large commercial movements and industrial development must speak and write this language.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1920, Woodward began to bring in students from Cuba. In order to recruit Cubans, Woodward hired Nestor Castellanos in 1926. Castellanos and his wife, Maria, had been instructors at Candler College in Havana. They moved to Atlanta to work at the school and as liaisons between Georgia Military Academy and Cuba. The Castellanos family spent their summers on the island recruiting students and then returned to GMA during the school year to teach.

Between 1928 and 1936 an average of seventeen Cuban students were in attendance at GMA each academic year.<sup>27</sup> These students helped keep the school open during the Depression by paying full tuition when most students could not afford it.<sup>28</sup> After their school careers at GMA, the Cuban students went on to universities in the States or for training that would prepare them to take over family businesses or positions waiting for them on the island or in U.S. firms.<sup>29</sup>

Woodward also worked to establish ties between Cuba and Atlanta through tours and competitions. In 1927, GMA cadets visited Havana for what would become an annual athletic competition between students from both cities. In 1929, Cuban students came to Atlanta to

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<sup>25</sup> “Georgia Military Academy Catalogue, 1902,” Georgia Military Academy Archives, College Park, Georgia; “Georgia Military Academy Catalogue, 1910,” Georgia Military Academy Archives, College Park, Georgia; Russell A Zaring. “They Call it the Game of War,” 57, 65..

<sup>26</sup> Russell A Zaring. “They Call it the Game of War,” 64.

<sup>27</sup> “Georgia Military Academy Yearbook” 1928-1936, Georgia Military Archives, College Park, Georgia.

<sup>28</sup> Robert D Bakentine, *The Woodward Story: A History of Woodward Academy 1900-1990* (College Park: Woodward Academy Inc., 1990).

<sup>29</sup> “Georgia Military Academy Yearbook,” 1928-1936, Georgia Military Archives, College Park, Georgia.

compete against the teams of the Georgia Military Academy. In the program for this “Cuban Goodwill Tour” of 1929 Woodward wrote:

A beautiful and impressive lesson to this effect was inaugurated and splendidly executed when a group of leading citizens of Cuba invited the basketball squad, cadet band and several faculty members of Georgia Military Academy to visit Havana as guests, and play a game of basketball with the celebrated Vedado Club in December, 1927. A year later another trip was made and both occasions were rendered memorable by the courtesies and hospitalities accorded to the cadets by the President and other public officials, the press and the citizens of Havana.

In extending invitations to our Cuban friends to visit us in return, Atlanta and Georgia join hands again with Cuba in further cementing the existing friendship between us.

Not only for commercial and geographical reasons, but also because of the historical and sacred ties written and sealed in the covenant of Cuban and American blood and human suffering, the friendship existing between these two republics is everlasting.

That this spirit of international friendship may be grasped by the youth of the two countries and preserved and handed down to successive generations is the desire of all right-thinking citizens.<sup>30</sup>

The visit by the Cubans to Atlanta took place from December 3-9, 1929. A delegation of businessmen and government officials from Havana accompanied the students.<sup>31</sup> The Cuban visitors were taken on tours of the city. They visited Emory and Oglethorpe universities as well as Agnes Scott College and Georgia Tech. They toured Stone Mountain, the Cyclorama, the Coca-Cola Company, and the federal prison. They were received at receptions and banquets everyday by dignitaries and socialites. During one dinner, New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt officially welcomed the Cuban visitors to Atlanta.<sup>32</sup>

The competitions between GMA athletes and their visitors were the central focus of this tour. On the second night, a basketball game was held between the Havana Yacht Club and

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<sup>30</sup> “Cuban Good Will Tour” Pamphlet, Atlanta History Center Archives. Atlanta.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Robert D Bakentine, *The Woodward Story: A History of Woodward Academy 1900-1990*. (College Park: Woodward Academy Inc. 1990).

Georgia Military Academy at the Georgia Tech Gymnasium. On the fourth day of the visit, Georgia Military Academy competed against the Cuban Athletic Club on Grant Field in Georgia's inaugural night football game.<sup>33</sup>

Businessmen from both countries were also deeply involved in the promotion of this event. They used this week-long gathering to promote both Havana and Atlanta as attractive places to visit, live, and conduct business. The souvenir program printed for this week was filled with advertisements that extolled the virtues of both cities. They used the event to target new customers through full page spreads in the souvenir program with titles such as "Atlanta . . . A City of Lovely Homes" and the "Sport Capital of the South."<sup>34</sup>

In this regard, the Cuban visit belonged to a larger effort on behalf of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to attract businesses and investors to the city. In 1926, the Chamber began a nationwide campaign called Forward Atlanta. The Chamber filled the nation's newspapers, magazines and journals with advertisements that touted the advantages the city had for distribution and manufacturing companies. The business leaders stressed the importance of the location of the city and its transportation facilities. They also promoted its schools and the weather in an effort to lure businesses.<sup>35</sup> Investing in the United States was also less risky than investments on the island.

Beyond Woodward Academy, Cubans attended universities in the area. By 1925, a number were enrolled at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Georgia Tech opened in 1888 and

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<sup>33</sup> "Cuban Good Will Tour" Pamphlet, Atlanta History Center Archives. Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn*, (NY: Penguin Press, 1997), 97-98; Clifford M Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990).



soon became an important technical school for the South.<sup>36</sup> Over the years siblings from Cuba could be found attending both GMA and Georgia Tech at the same time.<sup>37</sup> Cuban children went to Georgia Tech to obtain the technical education that they would need to be successful on the island. Some students became internationally known for skills learned during their training. Max Borges, for instance, graduated from Georgia Tech in 1939 and became a celebrated and influential architect in Cuba and elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

By 1948 Cuban students at Georgia Tech, along with other Latino students, organized the Latin American Club. In its first year it had a membership of forty-eight students, the majority of whom were Cuban. Later its name was changed to the Pan American Club and still later the Pan American Union Club. The club served as a social group as well as a vehicle for the students to use as a cultural exchange on the campus. They held dancing and other social events, and participated in intramural sports competitions. The group also sponsored guest speakers who would give talks and conduct discussions concerning the political situations of different Latin American countries. The club became a contact point for local businesses and organizations that were interested in Latin American affairs. These students presented radio programs each week, which broadcast discussions on Latin American politics as well as music and published a monthly newspaper distributed around campus.<sup>39</sup> Cubans continued to attend Georgia Tech and several were in attendance in 1960 when refugees began arriving in the city.

In 1948 a new athletic tradition between Atlanta and Havana began. The Havatlanta games, the name given to this annual event, exemplified the importance of the ties between the two cities. As the competitions did in the past, the Havatlanta games' host city alternated

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<sup>36</sup> H.D. Cutter "An Early History of Georgia Tech" (<http://gtalumni.org/news/magazine/spr98.history.html>); Eugene Griessman, "The Big Step Nobody Noticed" *Tech Alumni*, (Fall 1985); "History of Georgia Tech." (<http://www.gatech.edu/techhome/subpgs/visitor.html>).

<sup>37</sup> *The Technique*, 4 December 1925.

<sup>38</sup> "History of the Cuban Club of Atlanta," Cuban Club of Atlanta Private Papers, Atlanta.

<sup>39</sup> *The Blue Print*, 1928-1973. Georgia Technical University Press. Georgia Tech Archives, Atlanta.

between Havana and Atlanta each year.<sup>40</sup> The games began as a swim meet and extended over the years to six sports competitions, with more than 300 athletes each year.

The Havatlanta games were a collaboration between the north side Kiwanis club in Atlanta and the “Big Five” Yacht and country clubs of Havana, the Havana Yacht Club, Vedado Yacht Club, Miramar Yacht Club, Havana Country Club, and Biltmore Yacht Club.<sup>41</sup> Many of the organizers were athletes themselves. In Atlanta one of the organizers was Harry Glancy, a former Olympic swimmer. In Cuba the games were organized by Frank Trelles, a basketball and football player and Carlos de Cubas, the coach of the Cuban swim team.

Each year, Cuban and American children between the ages of six and fourteen competed against each other.<sup>42</sup> The friendships they made and the time spent together each day, after the games, proved to be more important. The visiting competitors and their families stayed with host families. They spent their free time sight-seeing, shopping, and visiting with their friends.<sup>43</sup> These trips made the visiting families familiar and comfortable with the host cities’ people, language, and customs.

The games ended with the beginning of Castro’s regime. The Havatlanta games were part of a world that was being quickly dismantled by Castro.<sup>44</sup> With his permission, the last games were held in Cuba in 1959. By the time the games were called off in 1960, traveling from Cuba was severely restricted and continuing the games could not be justified. The country clubs in Havana also soon closed, thereby putting an end to this tradition.

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<sup>40</sup> “Pan American Games” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. 3 August 1991.

<sup>41</sup> Raul Trujillo, interviewed by author, digital recording, Atlanta, GA, 6 April 2001.

<sup>42</sup> “de Cubas of Cuba” *Atlanta Journal*, 13 June 1961; “Pan American Games,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 3 August 1991; “Atlanta Swimmers, Golfers See Havana After Victory,” *Atlanta Journal*, 5 September 1949; “History of the Cuban Club of Atlanta,” Cuban Club of Atlanta Private Papers, Atlanta, Ga.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> “de Cubas of Cuba,”

Tradition, experience, and fond memories of Atlanta brought many Cubans back to the city. For the first half of the twentieth century, Cubans had lived in and visited Atlanta. Many spent a good part of their teenage years there. Others were familiar with the area through business trips and vacations. Families from both Georgia and Cuba were connected through friendships and acquaintances. The success of the Cuban revolution dramatically changed the importance of these friendships. Many Cubans quickly found that the change in government would not allow them to proceed with life on the island as they once had. They called on their friends in Atlanta for their support during this difficult time.

Cubans, who came to Atlanta for varying reasons, were not representative of the people on the island. The families who were involved in sports activities through their Yacht clubs were mostly wealthy white Cubans. So were those who had the means to send their children to school and summer camps in the area. Their class and wealth gave them the opportunity to participate and enjoy the area. Georgia was a safe place to invest in and to send their children. Through this contact trans-national ties were formed among the upper and middle classes of both Atlanta and Cuba.

### ***First Steps: Leaving the Island***

The success of the Cuban Revolution generated the largest exodus from Cuba to the United States. In March of 1952, Fulgencio Batista returned from exile and staged a bloodless coup, taking control of Cuba from President Carlos Prio. In July of 1953, an armed group of about 100 men led by Fidel Castro staged an abortive assault on the military headquarters outside of Santiago de Cuba. In November of 1956, Castro led another revolt against Batista and continued until 1959. In December of 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower instituted an arms embargo against Cuba and sent Batista a letter withdrawing support for his regime. The success

of Castro's revolution and the withdrawal of U.S. support gave cause for Batista and his closest supporters to leave Cuba quickly. The next day Castro took control.<sup>45</sup>

The refugees' ability to leave their island depended upon the political relationship between the United States and Cuba. In the early years of the Revolution, many families did not arrive to the United States as a unit. Often family members had to leave separately and under different pretenses so as not to alarm the Cuban government of their intentions. A family, for example, would send one child to the United States to attend a camp, another one for school. The head of the family could leave on a business trip and his wife on vacation. They would later reunite at a predetermined site. After 1960, refugees did not leave with much. The Cuban government largely restricted the money and possessions a refugee could take and kept what was left behind.

The United State's policy of acceptance of the refugees and Castro's policy controlling the exit of refugees changed frequently. Two such periods where both countries allowed the travel of refugees were the Camarioca Boatlift and the Freedom Flights. During these two efforts between 1965 and 1966, refugees squeezed themselves onto boats or planes and were accepted by the United States.<sup>46</sup>

The first step for refugees would prove to be the most difficult. For some, leaving the island seemed to be an impossibility. One such refugee, Frank Trelles, had to survive a Cuban jail before leaving Cuba. "I've never seen the sentence or charge," he remembers, "They [came] for me at two o'clock in the morning. For five years I slept on a stone floor, there were many

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<sup>45</sup> Alesandro Perez, *Cuban Americans* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1996), 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

others with me. In the night guards would throw buckets of water on us to amuse themselves.”<sup>47</sup>

Frank Trelles survived starvation and abuse before he made it to his family in Atlanta.

The success of the revolution was very destructive for some, especially those of the upper-middle classes. The majority of those who left Cuba at first were professionals or businessmen who found themselves stripped of their social positions and careers. When Trelles was arrested he was enjoying a successful life. He was president of a soft-drink bottling company, senior partner of a leading corporate law firm, and director of a medical cooperative that ran a hospital. It was, however, his love of sports that got him out of Cuba and attracted his family to Atlanta.

Two connections that Trelles had made through his involvement in sports competitions proved to change his life. Trelles was known through his place on the Central American Basketball team. While Trelles was in jail, one of his friends negotiated his release by agreeing to swim for Cuba in an upcoming competition. “We pass in the air, he recalls, “I ... to Mexico and he to Cuba.”<sup>48</sup> Trelles was also involved with the Havatlanta football team and was a leader of the organized competitions that were played in Havana and Atlanta. Over the years he had made lasting friendships through his participation with this event. When he moved to Atlanta with his family, he relied on these friendships as did many Cuban refugees.<sup>49</sup>

Cuban refugees had to endure a frustrating process before they could make it to the United States. One refugee who eventually came to Atlanta, Raul Trujillo, fled Havana in 1962. In order to get to the United States, he had to resign his job and could not work or go to school as he waited. He was told the waiting period would be a year. However, he was able to leave sooner

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<sup>47</sup> “How Castro Changed One Man’s Fortune,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 May 1968.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

since the government could benefit more by taking over the possessions he had to leave behind.<sup>50</sup> Another Atlanta refugee who was in Cuba working on a pipeline when the revolution began was able to travel to the United States, while his co-workers were detained. “The men in the office of the confiscated pipe line company were not permitted to leave.” He later explained, “Eleven were ordered to remain on the job and ‘bring the paper work up to date.’ There’s no telling what happened to them.”<sup>51</sup>

Many refugees risked their lives to make it to the United States. One Atlanta refugee escaped the island by boat. One day he acted as if he were going to go for a swim at one of the yacht clubs in Havana. He swam until he reached a small boat that he had arranged to meet him. His trip with the others on the boat was extremely dangerous. A storm came through and nearly drowned them all. It took them sixteen hours to reach the Florida Keys, a trip that would normally have had taken six.<sup>52</sup>

Carlos de Cubas was one refugee who chose Atlanta. Before de Cubas left Cuba, he was the sports director of the Miramar Club and worked in the physical education department of the University of Havana. He was offered a job with the municipal department of Havana in the office of recreation when Castro took control. He took the job and kept it for two months without pay just to keep a low profile. De Cubas was alarmed by the communist influence on his sons at school. One day his eldest son came home from the Catholic school that de Cubas and the rest of his family had attended, and told him that his teacher said the United States flag was ugly and the Russian flag was pretty. “That’s when I knew I had to do something,” de Cubas remembers. “I

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<sup>50</sup> Raul Trujillo, interviewed by author, digital recording, Atlanta, GA, 6 April 2001

<sup>51</sup> “Atlanta Cabbie Who Fled Cuba Sees Little Support for Castro,” *Atlanta Journal*. 23 November 1960.

<sup>52</sup> “They Want to Shove Castro Off Cuba’s Map,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1961.

had to leave and turn my back on my own country, but I did it with no sadness, because it is not my country anymore.”<sup>53</sup>

De Cubas followed the path through Miami that many refugees took on their way to other cities. De Cubas and his family split up and left Cuba in December 1960. They were reunited in Miami where de Cubas worked several jobs before he left for Atlanta. De Cubas was the swim coach for the Cuban Havatlanta swim team and had been to Atlanta several times before. With the help of friends he made during his trips there, he and his family moved to the city. Years later a friend remembered, “If they got out of Cuba at all they came to Atlanta because of their relationships with people.”<sup>54</sup>

Once refugees made it to the United States, they had to decide where they would live and find work. Many settled in the area surrounding their entry point into the United States. Others traveled to cities that had become familiar to them through the history between them and Cuba. Just as Cubans were drawn to Atlanta by their familiarity with the area, either through their own travels or those of people they knew, they also made their way to cities such as New York and Miami. Cubans left the island any way they could. During the times in which the United States was open to refugees, they were taken to Miami by government-sponsored rescues and private operations. When Cubans were unable to get visas for the United States, they first traveled via Mexico, Spain, or any other country that would give them a visa, and then worked on getting into the United States.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “de Cubas of Cuba.” *Atlanta Journal*.

<sup>54</sup> “Pan American Games,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 8/3/1991.

<sup>55</sup> Consuelo Fernandez Martin, Vincent Romano. *La Emigracion Cubana en España* (Madrid: Fundacion de Investigaciones Marxistas, 1994); Jose A Cobas, Jorge Duany. *Cubans in Puerto Rico: Ethnic Economy and Cultural Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Josefina de Hernandez Rios, Amanda Contreras. *Los Cubanos: Sociología De Una Comunidad De Inmigrantes En Venezuela* (Caracas: Fondo Editorial Tropykos, 1996); Rodolpho Ruz Menendez, “La Primera Emigracion Cubana a Yucatán,” *Revista de la Universidad de Yucatán*, Conrado Méndez Díaz ed. (Mérida: Departamento de Publicidad de la Universidad de Yucatán, 1998), 89; Alfonso Adalberto, *Cuba Entre Los Venezolanos*. (Caracas: Ediciones Giluz, 1999); Stephen Castles, and Mark J

Atlanta was not one of the cities to which the government relocated refugees, and direct flights from Cuba to Atlanta were rare. Those Cuban refugees who decided to continue to the city did so because something drew them there. Opportunities available in Atlanta existed in several cities closer to their entry point. Although a number of families made their way to Atlanta without having any prior contact with the city or anyone who lived in it, most Cubans traveled to Atlanta with hopes of creating a new life there based on their own personal relationships with Georgians and a century's old relationship between Cubans and Atlantans.<sup>56</sup>

Many former students returned to Atlanta because they were familiar with the city and knew people who could help them. For instance, Mario Salvador graduated from Georgia Tech in 1956 and returned to Cuba to work for a large plant after he got his degree. After evading the police in Cuba, he fled to the United States and returned to Atlanta where he later settled his entire family.<sup>57</sup>

Joe Valls spent many summers as a child at a summer camp at Tallulah Falls, Ga. While there, he and Robert Hooks, of Macon, Georgia, formed a lasting friendship. After their time together in camp, they began a tradition of visiting each other with their families. In fact, the Hooks were spending New Years in Cuba with the Valls when Castro took control. By the next summer the Valls realized that Castro's economic policies would not allow them to live on the island any longer. With help from the Hooks family, the Valls made preparations to leave. Their eldest son was already at the camp in Tallulah Falls. Joe left for the United States and his wife

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Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993).

<sup>56</sup> "Atlanta's Cuban Colony," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 September 1966.

<sup>57</sup> "The Last Long Wait," *Atlanta Journal*, 14 October 1965.



left with her three other children under the pretense that they were going to find the eldest son and bring him home. They quickly found themselves in Atlanta with their friends.<sup>58</sup>

Tony Rodriguez, a teenager during the Revolution, found his way to Atlanta through a family connection. In Cuba, he became involved in the counter-revolutionary movement and printed anti-Castro literature when he was in eighth grade. His family left Cuba after the Catholic Church they attended was bombed. When Tony's family moved to Miami, they found it hard to support the entire family. Tony's brother called on a friend in Atlanta to see if he could watch over Tony for a while. Glen Crofton, then the minister of education at Atlanta's Covenant Presbyterian church, agreed. He later enrolled Tony at Grady High School.<sup>59</sup>

Frank Cangelosi, the son of an American father and Cuban mother, had been to Atlanta before the revolution, as a student at Emory University. When he finished school, he moved back to Havana and got a job at an American company which he lost when Castro nationalized foreign-owned property. He planned to move to the United States, but not until he also helped a friend leave. His friend was a doctor who spoke out against Castro's health policies. As punishment, he was sent off to a remote part of Cuba. He soon learned that his friend was going to be taken to a naval base where he would be held prisoner. Through connections he had in the American Embassy, he secured the doctor a visa that would normally have taken someone a year to receive. The doctor's friends also got him a passport that classified him as unemployed, since as a doctor he would not be allowed to leave. They then got him a special exit permit by bribing the secret police. The refugee had to buy the plane ticket in the United States, so he had his brother who lived in Fort Lauderdale buy the tickets for the doctor. After five days of waiting,

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<sup>58</sup> "Castro Regime Will Fall Within a Year, Says Cuban in Macon," *Atlanta Journal*, 24 November 1960.

<sup>59</sup> "He Recalls Castro – With Hate," *Atlanta Journal*, 8 January 1961; "They Want to Shove Castro off Cuba's Map," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 March 1961.

the doctor left on his flight with five dollars and a bag of clothes. The day after he left, six doctors who were found trying to leave Cuba were arrested and put in jail.<sup>60</sup>

Cubans left in search of freedom and a better way of life. They had to make sacrifices to leave the island and escape Communism. One Atlanta refugee explained, “We Cubans do not come to America because we love American capitalism. We come because of what it symbolizes. We come because our land is being denied a privilege that every man is allowed to have: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. We also come as a symbol of what communism is in Cuba, and what it can bring to the human race if we do not open our eyes to it.”<sup>61</sup>

For many, the greatest sacrifice they had to make was to leave their families while they searched for places to live. Alfredo Ledon left his family in Miami until he could find a job and a suitable place for them to stay. He recalled his first couple of months in the United States: “When we left Cuba we first went to Miami as refugees. I stayed there for about less than a month because I had a friend in Atlanta. I went to Atlanta looking for a job and stayed with that family for some time. When I got a job I sent for my family, my wife and four children, from Miami.”<sup>62</sup>

As the years passed, the Cuban government reduced the possessions that Cuban refugees could take with them. Many Cubans left the island with “just enough for airplane fare... [they] landed in Miami stone broke.”<sup>63</sup> One refugee to Atlanta had to leave behind everything he had and could only take three changes of clothes. When he left behind his car he was told, “If you come back, you can pick it up in thirty days”. He remembered, “I had an overcoat that I had

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<sup>60</sup> “They Want to Shove Castro off Cuba’s Map,” *Atlanta Journal*, 19 March 1961.

<sup>61</sup> “Why Cubans Come, Explanation Given,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 November 1965.

<sup>62</sup> Alfredo Ledon, interview by author, digital recording, Atlanta, GA, 28 March 2001.

<sup>63</sup> “Atlanta Cabbie,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 11/23/1960.

made in Cuba for the climate here and when I was going to the steps of the plane, they (the police) said, ‘Wait a minute, we need that coat.’ I said, ‘Why?’ [They] said ‘it’s not going to be cold up in the United States so you don’t need that coat.’ So that was it, they gave me a receipt for the coat so I could pick it up in thirty days.”<sup>64</sup>

Many refugees had to forfeit their assets. Many owned real estate and businesses while others had money invested in businesses and land in the United States. Sometime people could only bring the clothes on their back and no more than five dollars.<sup>65</sup> In 1960, Dr. Bertha Iturrioz Arteché left behind a \$350,000 pharmaceutical plant in order to leave Cuba. Castro had started to mandate that all medicine be used, regardless of its quality. However, according to her account, if Iturrioz had thrown out a bad batch of medicine, or if an official was made sick from bad medicine, she faced the risk of being accused of treason. Iturrioz left Cuba with her son and husband and only \$90. She was able to begin her own new plant in Miami, which later merged with a firm in Atlanta.<sup>66</sup>

The Feliciano Gonzales Perez family came to Atlanta in 1965 after forfeiting an estate of more than \$250,000 in order to leave the island. Feliciano had worked for Bacardi in Cuba and owned real estate. When Castro took control of Bacardi, he was offered a salary of \$400 a month to stay with the plant. Feliciano declined and lived on his savings until he was able to leave. After leaving his home, car, real-estate holdings, and bank account to the Castro government, the family was left with nothing more than one suitcase of clothing. The couple came to Atlanta to live with their son, who had moved to Atlanta in 1959 through the help of a cousin, José de la Torre, who had already been living in the city.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Trujillo Interview.

<sup>65</sup> “Cuban Refugees Make One Appreciate U.S.,” *Atlanta Journal*, 11 January 1961.

<sup>66</sup> “Freedom Means Everything to State’s Cuban Refugees,” *Atlanta Journal*, 6 August 1967.

<sup>67</sup> “Exiles leave Lands Behind as Price for Fleeing Castro,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 December 1965.

Cubans left Cuba when they felt their lives or their livelihood were threatened by the new regime. During the first stages of the Revolution, Cubans who fled were those who were in immediate danger. Consequently, members of the overthrown government as well as those who would be labeled as enemies of the new government were the first to leave. Members of the upper class felt threatened, and later when their land and companies were confiscated, they also left. Many Cubans continued to stay in Cuba, originally convinced that communism and Castro would be good, but quickly saw that their future was bleak. Large groups of middle and lower class families would not begin to leave the island until the late 1970s although they could be found in the United States before then. Largely the refugees who left during the 1960s were upper class, professionals and business persons and their families, many of whom joined the counter revolutionary movement

<sup>68</sup>Cold war sentiment and anti-communism was fueled by the revolution in Cuba, attracting Atlantans to counter-revolutionary movements and groups. In 1960 several planes flew over Cuba in an attempt to disseminate counter-revolutionary pamphlets, provisions, and arms. Some were shot down, and the pilots were either jailed or executed. A number of these flights originated on Georgia airfields. Consequently, the government monitored Georgia air strips, as well as others, in an attempt to halt flights from leaving for Cuba. One pilot, a former Georgia Tech student, was banned from making private plane flights, and later became a soldier of fortune in Cuba.<sup>69</sup> When prisoners were taken in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, Atlantan firms joined together to help raise the money and provisions demanded by Castro for the release of his

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<sup>68</sup> Trujillo Interview.

<sup>69</sup> "Georgia Among 3 Watched To Halt Illegal Cuba Flights," *Atlanta Journal*, 24 April 1960; "U.S. Border Patrol Now Watching Georgia Airfields," *Atlanta Journal*, 22 May 1960; "Atlantan Barred From Cuba Trips," *Atlanta Journal*, 27 May 1960.

prisoners. The S.S.S. Company and Winn Dixie Grocery Company, among others, contributed supplies for the prisoner exchange fund.<sup>70</sup>

In 1962, WSB Radio began transmitting the Spanish program of the Voice of America. The station beamed the broadcasts to Cuba as a public service at the desire and request of the American government. Over two nights, the station broadcast material for the Cuban people, including a speech by President John F. Kennedy. This change in programming caused some confusion in Atlanta and some residents of the city “wondered if the government had taken over the station.” However, when it was explained to the locals that the station was doing this as a service, they “seemed real proud and pleased that WSB could be a part of it.”<sup>71</sup>

As the number of refugees quickly increased, Atlantans became increasingly aware of their presence. The numbers of refugees in Miami were much more staggering than in Atlanta. However, Atlanta was not equipped to handle these refugees who quickly taxed the disconnected resources of the individuals, aid societies, religious institutions, and government agencies that worked to settle them. By 1961, an estimated 170 Cubans lived in the area.<sup>72</sup> In 1965, an estimated 877 Cubans in Atlanta had registered with the INS.<sup>73</sup> By 1966, families already living in Atlanta added family members who were released through the Camarioca Boatlift and Freedom Flights, jumping the number of Cubans to 2,500 (one-hundred of whom were newborns).<sup>74</sup> During the rest of the 1960s and the 1970s many other refugees made their way to Atlanta.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Two Atlantan Firms Help Free Cubans,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 December 1962.

<sup>71</sup> “WSB Ready for ‘Voice’ Broadcasts,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 October 1962; “Spanish on Radio Puzzling,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 October 1962; “Spanish Broadcasts Upset Some, But Most People Understood,” *Atlanta Journal*, 25 October 1962.

<sup>72</sup> “They want to Shove Castro Off Cuba’s Map,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1961.

<sup>73</sup> “1,000 More Cubans Expected to Settle Here,” *Atlanta Journal*, 13 October 1965.

<sup>74</sup> “Atlanta’s Cuban Colony,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 September 1966.

<sup>75</sup> “Cuban Refugees Find Atlanta Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1962.

As Cubans entered Atlanta, they quickly worked to establish a new life in the city. Finding a place to live was of first importance, and they stayed wherever they found room. Many first lived with family or friends already in the city. When they were financially able to support themselves, they moved into apartments or houses close by in the city. Years later, many took advantage of new construction north of the city and continued to move northward while others stayed in town. As refugees continued to come to Atlanta, Cubans in the area could be found in different stages of settlement. While some were just entering the city and looking for jobs and housing they could afford, other Cubans, who moved to Atlanta in the 1950s and earlier enjoyed the stability of careers and households that took them years to establish. Due to this constant movement within the area, there was never a large enclave of Cubans but rather small pockets throughout the city.<sup>76</sup>

Although Cubans did not live in a concentrated area, they cooperated and organized themselves. They kept in contact through a network of friends and family that tied them together. When a group of Cubans found a good apartment building or neighborhood, word of mouth attracted others, creating pockets of refugees throughout the area. One such concentration of Cubans lived in the area behind Broadview Plaza in the area named “Pastorita” after the woman in Castro’s regime who was in charge of giving out low-income housing in Cuba. Some Cubans also lived in apartments in Grant Park as well as in Techwood Homes, a government housing project near Georgia Tech.<sup>77</sup>

Atlantans who worked with aid groups or who were close to Cubans in the community worked to help refugees as they came to the city. They began volunteer work with aid

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<sup>76</sup> Trujillo interview; United States Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population and Housing : General Demographic Trends for Metropolitan Areas, 1960 to 1970* (Washington : U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1971); United States Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population and Housing : General Demographic Trends for Metropolitan Areas* (Washington : U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1981);

<sup>77</sup> Ann Burton Kirkley, “Atlanta’s Ethnic Population: An Examination of Cuban Immigrants” (MA Thesis, Georgia State University, 1975); Trujillo interview.

organizations and helped them find food, housing and clothing. Helpers also served as contacts for other sources of support. A couple of local Catholic churches printed bulletins in English and Spanish that explained where refugees could go to receive assistance. The bulletins provided lists of people, mostly Cubans, whom the refugees could contact for further assistance.

This support lacked a centralized organization when it began and depended on an individual's or organization's resources and time. People in Atlanta worked to help refugees find jobs, while friends and family secured jobs for those coming to live with them whenever possible. Others were sent to the Georgia State employment office where they could look for jobs and receive a card that allowed them to register for surplus food. Local government aid was available; however, certain steps needed to be followed to obtain support. This along with many of the refugees' inability to speak adequate English, and their initial reluctance to provide personal information to government personnel made this aid hard to obtain.

The government based surplus food on the amount of money the household made and how many people were in the household. For example, if a household of three to four people made less than \$135.00 a month in 1961, it was eligible for surplus food. The food could be picked up at the Old Farmer's Market across the railroad from Lee Street at Sylvan Rd. Each family would receive five pounds of meal, ten pounds of flour, rice, dried milk, dried eggs, pork and gravy, lard, oatmeal, and dried beans.<sup>78</sup> Refugees needed to be residents of Fulton County for a month before they could go to the Department of Public Welfare to receive assistance. Cubans and Atlantans helped the most recent refugees by setting up an emergency relief fund.

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<sup>78</sup> "Bulletin for Cuban Refugees," Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971, Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

The fund, held at the Trust Company of Georgia, helped those who needed immediate monetary assistance.<sup>79</sup>

When the refugees arrived in Atlanta, other refugees along with Cubans who had lived in the city for some time also assisted them. Mr. and Mrs. Mateo Diaz came to Atlanta in December 1965, and were helped by other Cuban refugees. When they first arrived in the city, a friend shared his bachelor apartment with Mr. Diaz and found temporary quarters for Mrs. Diaz until the couple found an apartment through the assistance of Our Lady of Charity Conference. Fellow refugees loaned them furnishings. They had three chairs, one donated, two borrowed. They also borrowed a few dishes and a bed. The couple used the best of the three chairs as their table as they sat on the floor to eat.<sup>80</sup>

Many Cubans had trouble finding jobs when they first came to Atlanta due to their lack of English-language skills. A lawyer who had once served in Castro's government began working at a dry cleaning plant. When asked about his job he explained "I rub out spots ... I remove spots from clothes." Refugees were willing to accept menial jobs when they arrived in the city, sometimes taking on positions that were much different than the ones they had in Cuba. For instance, Victoriano Dedric had been an accountant in Cuba. When he arrived in Atlanta he found work in a packaging department of a pharmaceutical house. Jose C. Ramirez also moved his family to the area. He had owned a barber shop in Cuba and worked as a checker for a big sugar mill. In Atlanta, he worked as a barber.<sup>81</sup>

Along with adapting to their new surroundings, refugees also had to come to terms with their increasing awareness that going back to Cuba would not be achieved as quickly as they had

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> "Cuban Pair Adapts to Life of Freedom," *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 December 1965.

<sup>81</sup> "They Want to Shove Castro off Cuba's Map," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1961; "Cuban Refugees Here Hope, Despair," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 April 1961; "Atlanta's Cuban Colony," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 September 1966.



hoped. The Cubans first came to Atlanta thinking that Castro would not last long on the island and that they would soon be able to go back to their homes. Most were certain that his regime would fail or the United States would intervene. Many echoed the sentiment of a Cuban attorney who said in 1960, “Castro can’t last longer than six to eight months-a year at the longest.”<sup>82</sup> Another refugee agreed, “We hope that he will be overthrown in a few months. He is staying in power only by terrorist tactics.”<sup>83</sup> During the early 1960s, U.S. – Cuban relations gave the Cuban refugees hope that they would return to Cuba. As the years continued to pass, they fought to keep that hope alive.

Cuban refugees worked hard to make the United States home away from home. They found jobs, started new careers, and lived their lives in America all with the intention of going back to Cuba. Even today, going back to the old Cuba is still a nostalgic dream for many; however, they realized soon after moving to Atlanta that to live in a state of limbo would not benefit their families. They continued living their new lives with the hopes of one day being able to go back to Cuba. “We are trying to lead a normal life,” a Cuban refugee explained. “We don’t sit down and pity ourselves and say we are not going to do anything. That is not our attitude. We want to be helpful, to ourselves and to society.”<sup>84</sup> In the meantime they worked to help each other cope with living in Atlanta and coming to terms that their stay may be longer than they originally had anticipated.

In May of 1966 a group of Cuban exiles and refugees gathered together to celebrate the sixty-fourth anniversary of the Cuban Republic. This celebration was a chance for refugees to remember the country they had once loved and lament the limbo in which they now lived. Jose Ramirez, president of the Cuban Freedom Committee of Georgia, extended a welcome to new

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<sup>82</sup> “Castro Regime Will Fall,” *Atlanta Journal*, 24 November 1960.

<sup>83</sup> “They Want to Shove Castro off Cuba’s Map,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1961.

<sup>84</sup> “Atlanta’s Cuban Colony,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 September 1966.

refugees who had just arrived in the city and asked that they join their fellow refugees who, Ramirez explained, “far from spurning the hospitality of their host still want to go home.” The festivities all centered on exile-inspired poetry and music expressing the refugees’ longing to return home. Dr. Juan Miguel Portuondo, former professor at the University of Havana and staff member of Georgia State Hospital at Milledgeville at the time, explained the different stages of acceptance found among the refugees. “The exiles fall into three classes, those who have given up, those who continue to fight against Castro, and those who support the fight.” In all, the gathering was a time for the refugees to express their frustration with their increasing awareness that their stay would be longer than planned, while others struggled with coming to terms with their situation. All of the refugees had to deal with these feelings while at the same time creating a new life for themselves and their families.<sup>85</sup>

The history of travel and contact between Cubans and Atlantans laid the base of support refugees would draw upon during the Revolution. Long-held traditions and friendships of people in both areas drew refugees to the city. They relied on the Atlantans they knew and their familiarity with the city and its culture for the sustenance needed to start over. Cubans were embraced by Atlantans who worked to help them. However, their needs quickly became more than individuals or state and religious aid giving could handle. In Atlanta, it would take a concerted organized effort by a variety of available agencies for aid and their collaboration with area Cubans to effectively reach the growing number of refugees entering the city.

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<sup>85</sup> “Exiles Gather Long For Cuba,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 May 1966.

## Religion and Aid

Religious institutions have historically played an important role in the lives of immigrants to America. For many refugees the first step towards participation in their new communities has been through their local church. Consequently, this interaction has affected the level of acceptance felt by immigrants and how they have begun to construct their identity as new Americans. Some churches accepted new members who came from other denominations and spoke different languages than that of the congregation. They tried to accommodate the new members in order to make their time of worship more comfortable by providing services or religious classes in the immigrants' native language, or in translation. These services allowed the immigrants to worship in a more comfortable setting than if they were given no choice but to attend services given only in English. Other churches treated the immigrants' heritage and religious practices as inferior and created or participated in Americanization projects. Americanization projects focused on pressuring the immigrants into assimilating into the "dominant" culture by discouraging them to continue to practice their religion in their native language or from observing any traditional religious practices.<sup>86</sup>

For instance, Protestant and Catholic churches worked to Americanize Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles during the 1920s. The Protestant churches worked to teach Mexicans

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<sup>86</sup> For more on immigrants in the church see: Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens, *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration Upon the Archdiocese of New York* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press., 1993); Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press., 1975); Helen Rose Ebaugh, Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Communities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press., 2000).

English as they converted them from Catholicism. These Protestant congregations were not favorable to the introduction of immigrants to their churches and limited their work with the Mexicans to missionary work, member contributions and developing separate churches for the Mexican community. During this time, the Catholic Church felt threatened by the proselytizing of the Protestants and worked to hold on to the immigrants. In the Catholic Church efforts, were made to “root out the foreignness of the immigrants through the emphasis of Catholic tradition.” This project to Americanize Latinos within the Catholic Church during the 1920s spawned the Confraternity of Christian doctrine (CCD). The CCD was in charge of the religious instruction of the Mexican children who attended public schools. The CCD was set up on the premise that Mexicans came to the United States without proper religious training and that through such training the immigrants would not “fall” to the Protestant churches. Their work with the Mexicans was deeply “rooted in the framework of Americanization and within an attitude which viewed Mexican folk Catholicism as deficient and unprogressive.”<sup>87</sup>

In contrast, Cuban refugees in Atlanta were not forced to assimilate by the churches they attended. The church was a place where the refugees found the support needed to continue to hold on to their identity as Cubans. Atlantan churches provided the refugees the necessary space to hold on to their culture instead of trying to instantly meld them into the native population. Many Cubans became active church members and were very involved in church-led aid efforts for fellow refugees.

Refugees had an instant impact on churches in Atlanta. Many Cubans were referred to local churches by friends, family and aid workers in other cities. Refugees were told about

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<sup>87</sup> George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

support groups and activities sponsored by churches. Word of mouth made certain institutions, such as Immaculate Conception, popular among refugees.

The number of Cubans arriving at churches, especially Catholic churches, quickly taxed their resources. Churches which helped the refugees worked either through the channels of sponsorship or, more commonly, direct aid. As the numbers of refugees increased, some local Protestant and Catholic churches began to work to help them. Local churches sponsored a small number of the refugees. Sponsorship constituted a small part of the larger effort put forth by local churches to help the refugees. Various churches chose families to sponsor from lists compiled by relief agencies in South Florida, and brought them into the city. Churches also began to focus their efforts towards the emergent Cuban community made up of refugees who were not sponsored.

Government aid was not immediately available for Cubans. They could only receive aid from the state if they came to Atlanta as documented refugees, and if they did not come through a refugee agency, they were not given the refugee identification numbers required to obtain state and federal aid.<sup>88</sup> In addition, some aid would not become available to them until they lived in the city for a month. Many of the refugees to the city came either unaware of these restrictions, or were unwilling to leave a record of where they were out of fear that Castro's government would track them down.<sup>89</sup> Those who came to Atlanta without going through the government protocol were unofficially living in the city according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

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<sup>88</sup> "Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Assembly Room, October 18, 1961 to Discuss Cuban Refugee Situation," Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>89</sup> "The Cuban Refugee Story, According to the Atlanta DCCW, Christ the King Alter Society Meeting, October 6, 1961" Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

Cubans who lived in Atlanta before the refugees' arrival worked to help the newcomers. Many of the resident Cubans became lead organizers in the different organizations that provided aid. The resident Cubans were already in attendance at some of the city Catholic and Protestant Churches and became contacts for the refugees who came to the churches for help.

### ***Atlanta's Catholic Archdiocese Aid Effort***

Most refugees came to Atlanta on their own and were Catholic. During the early 1960s Catholic resettlement agencies in Florida directed refugees to go to the Church of Immaculate Conception in downtown Atlanta to find help, as this was the only Catholic Church in the city that had a Spanish-speaking priest. Some days refugees arrived at the church before word arrived that they were on their way. Others went to Immaculate Conception because they were told that a group of Cubans met once a month for a gathering after the service. The Cuban refugees soon became an integral part of the church's congregation.

The number of refugees quickly increased in the beginning of 1960. Because of this increase, Bishop Joseph Hyland of the Atlanta diocese gave Father Roderic Petrie the assignment of working with the Latin American residents of the city and assisting them with their religious needs. In September of 1960 Father Petrie and a group of Catholic Cubans, as well as other Latinos, began the Spanish Catholic Action Group. The objective of this group was to be not only religious and Catholic but to create a fellowship among the Spanish speakers within the parishes.<sup>90</sup> The members of this group participated in activities such as picnics and dinners.<sup>91</sup> The Spanish Catholic Action Group met once a month at Immaculate Conception. The participants

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<sup>90</sup> "The History of the Hispanic Catholic People in the Archdiocese of Atlanta," Hispanic Apostolate Files 014/1 F.11 Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; "Walking Together: The Hispanic Pastor Plan of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. May 19, 1991." Hispanic Apostolate Files 014/1 F.11 Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>91</sup> "Acción Católica Hispano-Americana Letter to Congregation of Sacred Heart from President of Spanish Catholic Action Group. April 30, 1974." Hispanic Apostolate File 013/6 f.2. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

would first attend a Spanish mass and then meet in the congregation hall for a dinner. After dinner, the members held a group meeting, where they discussed and scheduled future events and projects. Often their meetings were followed by dances or shows.<sup>92</sup>

The Spanish Catholic Action Group became one of the first support groups for Cubans in the area and quickly became known throughout the Cuban community. The Catholic resettlement office in Miami told many of the refugees about the group as a place to meet other Cubans. Other immigrants were referred to the group when they went to Immaculate Conception for help. The group was a source of entertainment where they could find comfort in being around others who knew their language and could empathize with their experiences.<sup>93</sup>

The success of the Spanish Catholic Action Group was largely based on the presence of a Spanish-speaking priest and his collaboration with Cubans when starting the group. Many of the organizers were Cubans who lived in the city before refugees began to arrive. Their contacts were important when putting together aid programs. They themselves became points of contact for refugees looking for help. The involvement of local Cubans made the group more accessible to the refugees than if it were run solely by non-Cuban church members. Refugees were more comfortable working with fellow Cubans and Spanish speakers who quickly worked to translate information pertinent to their needs, such as lists of government offices they needed to contact.

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<sup>92</sup> “Acción Católica Hispano-Americana, October 23, 1967.” Raul Trujillo Private Papers, Atlanta, Georgia; “Acción Católica Hispano-Americana, October 28, 1967.” Raul Trujillo Private Papers, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>93</sup> Máximo Clavijo, “*Memoria Y Reseño Histórica de la Acción Católica Hispano-América*” Unpublished paper. Paul Trujillo Private Papers; Raul Trujillo, “*Acta*” Unpublished Paper. 1967, Raul Trujillo Private Papers; Raul Trujillo, “Letter to Members of the Spanish Catholic Action Group”. March 27, 1967, Unpublished letter, Raul Trujillo Private Papers; Raul Trujillo, “Letter to Members of the Spanish Catholic Action Group”. August 6, 1967 Unpublished letter, Raul Trujillo Private Papers; Raul Trujillo, “Letter to Members of the Spanish Catholic Action Group,” October 23, 1967, Unpublished letter, Raul Trujillo Private Papers; Raul Trujillo, “Letter to Members of the Spanish Catholic Action Group”, October 28, 1967, Unpublished letter, Raul Trujillo Private Papers; Raul Trujillo, “Letter to Members of the Spanish Catholic Action Group”, August 26, 1968, Unpublished letter, Raul Trujillo Private Papers; Lydia D Andrews, “Letter to Members of the Spanish Catholic Action Group”, October, 1968, Unpublished letter, Raul Trujillo Private Papers.

The Spanish Catholic Action Group became one of several groups that worked to help the refugees.

Cuban refugees were aided by different groups, societies and individuals; however, each entity worked in an uncoordinated effort which soon proved to be too big an effort to handle. As the number of refugees continued to increase, it became clear that the aid being offered needed to be coordinated among all those who were helping the Cubans in order to be able to continue to provide them aid.

A meeting held in Athens, Georgia on June 3, 1961, discussed the gravity of the situation. After the board meeting, the diocesan chairman of the Foreign Relief Committee presented a program that highlighted the Cuban refugee situation in Miami in order to portray the seriousness of the situation. Representatives from the archdiocese of Miami and Cuban refugees from Florida presented information concerning the situation of the refugees they were helping. They explained that the refugees were fleeing a Communist government that was attacking their freedom to worship. They also asserted that it was the church's religious duty to help them.<sup>94</sup>

After this meeting the leaders of the Atlanta archdiocese began to organize their relief efforts more comprehensively. Various church leaders came together to study the situation and make recommendations. They worked to provide the Cubans "jobs, food, shelter and warm clothing."<sup>95</sup> The Archdiocese set up a resettlement committee in order to identify and coordinate the aid refugees needed. It was made up of leaders in the archdiocese as well as Cuban and Atlantan church members. In 1961, the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta founded the Latin

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<sup>94</sup> "The Cuban Refugee Story, According to the Atlanta DCCW", Christ the King Alter Society Meeting, October 6, 1961", Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.



American Resettlement Project to meet the needs of the Cuban refugees coming into Atlanta.<sup>96</sup> On October 12, 1961, representatives from the various Catholic organizations began to meet in order to coordinate these efforts. During the first meeting of the resettlement committee, and subsequent meetings, the groups and their members worked to organize the aid that would be given to the refugees.<sup>97</sup> The Spanish Catholic Action Group put together a Cuban committee to work along with the other agencies in finding aid. In addition, the St. Vincent dePaul Society provided shelter and food for the refugees until they found jobs. These actions were meant to reassure refugees that they were there to help them until they could help themselves.<sup>98</sup>

When the resettlement agencies began to analyze the situation, they realized that some Catholic Cubans were using services provided to them by Protestant churches. A news article fueled this concern. It highlighted a young Cuban Catholic boy who moved to Atlanta to live with a Presbyterian minister, who happened to be a family friend. Church leaders also learned that refugees had begun to go to Protestant churches to take English classes. One member of the resettlement committee was concerned that, “If the Catholic Church does not take care of these refugees, someone else is going to do so. Some Spanish people are being given welfare and are being taken to Protestant Churches. The Protestant help is weaning Catholics away from the church.”<sup>99</sup> The same concern was brought up in a later meeting, where an organizer asked if “it

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<sup>96</sup> “Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Rectory October 12, 1961 to Discuss the Cuban Refugee Situation.” Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>97</sup> “Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Rectory October 12, 1961 to Discuss the Cuban Refugee Situation.” Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

would be practical to send a letter to all Protestant churches in Atlanta asking for a list of Catholic Cubans who have come to their attention.”<sup>100</sup>

The Atlanta Archdiocese quickly began to organize all of its aid groups and delegated different parts of the resettlement effort to each group. Their efforts were divided up into different departments which took care of material goods, food, shelter, employment, or money. Others helped set up local government assistance and utilities. Most important, a group was set up to provide emotional support. Different aid societies worked on each piece of the effort based on what they were best able to provide.<sup>101</sup> Each parish had a person who could help refugees. A group of women from Christ the King Parish set up a warehouse where refugees could go to get clothing and furniture. St. Vincent dePaul and its League of Our Lady of Charity took charge of providing food and shelter for the refugees in their respective parishes. They also set up committees that would visit the refugees in their homes. A bulletin for Cuban refugees let them know where they could find the aid that they needed. Over 100 Cuban refugees who attended an “open house meeting” at the home of one of the organizers on December 11, 1961 received this bulletin.<sup>102</sup> Also in December, local Cubans and Atlantans established an emergency relief fund in order to meet the unmet needs of refugees. This fund existed as a revolving fund that could offer Cubans immediate cash assistance, which they would pay back when they began to work.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Assembly Room, October 18, 1961 to Discuss Cuban Refugee Situation,” Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>101</sup> Summary of Cuban Refugees Activities in Atlanta,” Folder Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971, Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>102</sup> “Summary of Cuban Refugees Activities in Atlanta.” Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>103</sup> “Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Rectory October 12, 1961 to Discuss the Cuban Refugee Situation,” Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; “Summary of Cuban Refugees Activities in Atlanta.” Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971, Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; “The Cuban Refugee Story, According to the Atlanta DCCW,” Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; “Minutes of Meeting Held in

The Catholic Archdiocese worked closely with the Cuban community and worked to address its concerns. One of the major concerns of the Cubans was their children's education. The Cuban community did not initially believe that they would stay in the city forever and many families wanted to make sure that their children would be ready to move back to Cuba. Consequently, they wanted them to continue to learn about their country and to practice their native language.<sup>104</sup> A Catholic family lay group started a Saturday school which was later taken over by the League of Our Lady of Charity. The classes given each Saturday were free to the students and taught each week by volunteers, many of them Cubans. The children learned Spanish grammar. They also learned about Cuba and participated in activities geared to helping them learn Cuban customs and history. While some children practiced their Spanish grammar, others could be found drawing the Cuban flag and singing Cuban songs. The parents feared that in Atlanta, where their children were completely immersed in English, their children would forget Spanish and their Cuban heritage. Parents attended English classes while the children worked with the instructors who strove to keep alive "the language, music, costumes and traditions of their country." The children also learned about the importance of the "great American democracy" of the United States and how it differed from Communist regimes. Through this school, the Cuban children were instilled with the pride of their country and their

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Sacred Heart Assembly Room, October 18, 1961," Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; "Bulletin of Information For Cuban Refugees." Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971, Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta

<sup>104</sup> "The History of the Hispanic Catholic People in the Archdiocese of Atlanta Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; *Walking Together: The Hispanic Pastor Plan of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. May 19, 1991.* Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; "Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Assembly Room, October 18, 1961," Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; "The Cuban Refugee Story, According to the Atlanta DCDW," Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

culture, while their parents learned a new culture in order to provide for their children while they waited for a freed Cuba.<sup>105</sup>

### ***Protestant Involvement***

While the Catholic Church worked to help the Cuban refugees in a variety of ways, some Protestant churches in the city also interacted with the newcomers, both Catholic and Protestants. Protestant churches worked with the refugees in a different capacity than the Catholic Church. Their involvement centered on their sponsorship of refugees. Through sponsorship, a church would be sent a refugee family for whom the congregation took responsibility. Each church would then concentrate its efforts on those families instead of the larger numbers helped by the Catholic Church.

Several Baptist churches in Atlanta helped with the efforts to resettle Cuban families. Three churches sponsored Cuban refugee families in 1962. The churches, Kirkwood Baptist, Woodland Hills Baptist, and Oakhurst Baptist Church, worked with the Cuban families they sponsored and helped them establish themselves in the city. Cubans who lived in Atlanta and were members of these congregations aided some of the churches. In addition, churches that had never had Spanish-speaking church members got involved with the refugees.

Kirkwood Baptist Church sponsored its first family in March 1962. The congregation helped Mr. Raul Amieva and his family in the resettlement process. Mr. Amieva, who was in his early thirties, brought his wife and their two sons. He had worked for the Cuban water works and was also a pharmaceutical supply salesman. His wife had worked as a teacher and a secretary in Cuba. The Kirkwood congregation assumed full responsibility for them and worked to help them

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<sup>105</sup> "Charm of Turkey Lingers," *Atlanta Journal*, 28 November 1963.

feel welcomed.<sup>106</sup> The congregation bought a house and furnished it for the Amieva family. They also found a job for the husband.

Woodland Hills Baptist church also helped resettle some families. They first resettled the family of a Cuban pharmacist at Georgia Baptist Hospital.<sup>107</sup> They also resettled a Catholic family, the Calzadas. The Calzada family had been living in Miami for almost a year when they moved to Atlanta. Rafael Calzada, a statistician in Cuba, and his family were sent to the church after its pastor, Reverend Joseph Abstance, told the Baptist resettlement office in Miami that he had no preferences for the religious association of the family they would send him. The congregation painted and furnished a house for the Calzada family and arranged some English lessons for Mr. Calzada, who knew no English at the time.<sup>108</sup>

Oakhurst Baptist church had a large number of Cubans in its congregation in the early 1960s. The church already had in attendance a couple of Cuban families who had moved themselves to the city and chosen Oakhurst as their church. As the church began to sponsor families, the congregation worked to fulfill both personal and spiritual needs. In July of 1962, the church “adopted” the Ruiz family. The church found and furnished a house for the family and a job for Mr. Ruiz that guaranteed an income for six months while he learned English.

In 1963, the Church sponsored the Delgado family. As Sergio Delgado explained:

The Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia agreed to sponsor us and we got in touch with Rev. Robert Fricke of the Baptist Spanish Center in Miami, Florida. We had asked to be sent to Atlanta, Georgia, because our son was in this city and it seems practical to be near to help each other in our daily life. We arrived in Atlanta on May 11, 1963, where we were received with happiness and love.... We were made comfortable in an apartment and the next day, Sunday, we were presented to the congregation at the morning worship service at Oakhurst. The words of welcome were very stimulating. We could see the desire of this group of Christians to help

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<sup>106</sup> “Cuban Refugees Find Atlanta Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1962,

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> “Welcome Awaiting Refugees,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 September 1962.

us start a new life and to relieve as much as possible the feeling of depression that the last days in Cuba had put on our spirits.<sup>109</sup>

Oakhurst Baptist began to adapt to the needs of the new Spanish-speaking members. In the beginning for those who could not understand English, a bilingual Cuban member translated services into Spanish.<sup>110</sup> In time, the church worked with the Cuban members to provide Bible study and Sunday school classes in Spanish. Cuban members of the church taught these classes. The Cubans also organized a weekly prayer group to meet the need “for that extra fellowship” to which they were accustomed.<sup>111</sup> Baptist Cubans who were members of other churches in the city attended this group, which met every Tuesday night.<sup>112</sup> Oakhurst allowed the Cubans to make themselves comfortable in the church. The church gave them the freedom to help each other and make it possible for the refugees to worship with the other members of the church. Cubans in the church had the opportunity to establish leadership positions that gave them the ability to help new refugees.

After this first wave, Southern Baptist churches did not sponsor many more families to Atlanta. Southern Baptist churches had stopped resettling Cuban refugees by the time the larger waves of them began arriving to the United States in the mid-60s. They shifted their sponsorship to refugees from South East Asia. By 1968, there was not one church on file with the Baptist office in Miami indicating a willingness to help relocate a Cuban family.<sup>113</sup>

Some Methodist churches in the city also sponsored refugees from Cuba. Church leaders of the North Georgia Conference in 1963 during the Division of Peace and World Order meeting

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<sup>109</sup> “‘No Speaka Spanish’ Church finds Empathy with Cubans,” *Atlanta Journal*, 14 July 1962.

<sup>110</sup> Sergio Delgado, “Si, USA” *Royal Service* (January 1965), Southern Baptist Archives, Nashville.

<sup>111</sup> Walker Knight, “Cubans in Our Churches,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine* (February 1965). Southern Baptist Archives, Nashville; Sergio Delgado, “Si, USA.”

<sup>112</sup> Louis L Dabny. “Christ for the Cubans,” *Royal Service* (January 1965) Southern Baptist Archives, Nashville.

<sup>113</sup> Cyril Bryant, “3,800 Cubans Every Month Find Refuge in the United States.” *Royal Service* (July 1968) Southern Baptist Archives, Nashville; Kenneth Day, “The Mission Field Comes to Us,” *Home Missions*. (January 1968) Southern Baptist Archives, Nashville.

urged that careful consideration be given to the continuing significance of the Cuban situation and Christian responsibility to the situation.”<sup>114</sup> In July of that same year fifteen refugee families were scheduled to be settled in Atlanta by the Conference under a program headed by several Protestant denominations in the Southeast.<sup>115</sup> In 1963, Methodist churches resettled five families into the Atlanta area.

In October 1963, one of the first families resettled by the Methodist church arrived in metro Atlanta. The Avondale Methodist Church sponsored the Tamayo family. The church’s commission on Christian Social Concerns, along with other church members, rented and furnished an apartment for the family of four. They filled the pantry for the family, and the women provided meals for the family during the first two days after arrival. Mr. Tamayo had a job within the first week of arrival to the city.

Belvedere Methodist Church resettled the Pupo family to Atlanta soon after. The Pupo couple came to Atlanta with their daughter after having lived in Miami for a year. The Pupo family had a Catholic background; however, their sponsorship was made possible through their association with a Methodist church in Miami. Their daughter, who was nineteen at the time, was a practicing Methodist. The church provided a furnished and stocked apartment. The Pupos were also put in contact with other Cubans in order that they “would have some close connections in the area.”<sup>116</sup>

### ***Evolution of the Aid Process***

Protestant churches continued to work with refugees into the mid-1960s. While they did not continue to sponsor Cubans, they continued to help the refugees they brought into the city as

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<sup>114</sup> William A Tyson Jr, ed. *Yearbook and Minutes of the Ninety-Eighth Session North Georgia Conference of The Methodist Church*. (Dalton: 1964) 105.

<sup>115</sup> “Resettlement Set In North Georgia for Cuban Refugees,” *The Wesleyan: Official Organ of Georgia Methodism*. (July 18, 1963): 1.

<sup>116</sup> “Belvedere Church Aids Cuban Family.” *The Wesleyan: Official Organ of Georgia Methodism*, (14 November 1963), 3.

the sponsored refugees became active members of their congregations. The Protestant and Catholic churches which worked with the refugees began an evolution that would make them aware of the differences in the religious needs of people from other cultures. It would be the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta however, which would take this work with Cuban refugees and turn it into the basis for a permanent aid division to service the needs of refugees.

With each year, the Archdiocese became better equipped to help the refugees' needs. Many groups put together to help were incorporated into the archdiocese. Groups such as the Spanish Catholic Action Group quickly organized themselves by creating committees to work with the rest of the Catholic aid organizations to help with resettlement.

In 1964, the Spanish arm of the St. Vincent dePaul Society called League of Our Lady of Charity (La Conferencia de Nuestra Senora de la Caridad) was formed.<sup>117</sup> Its name, taken from the patroness of Cuba, was born out of the aid efforts already being realized by the members of the churches with a large Cuban membership.<sup>118</sup> Many who had been helping for five years could no longer do so without a central organization to help the refugees who continued to enter the city and led to the creation of the League. This organization was put together through the work of the only Spanish-speaking priest in Atlanta at the time, Father Marian Shuk, as well as others who had been working with the refugees.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "The History of the Hispanic Catholic People in the Archdiocese of Atlanta," Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta. "*Walking Together: The Hispanic Pastor Plan of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. May 19, 1991,*" Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; "Memorandum from Father Sanches to Archbishop Donnellan and Father Hardy September 14, 1972," Hispanic Apostolate file 013/6 f. 1. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archive, Atlanta.

<sup>118</sup> "Memorandum: League of Our Lady of Charity." Hispanic Apostolate files 013/6 f. 1. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>119</sup> Memorandum from Father Sanches to Archbishop Donnellan and Father Hardy September 14, 1972," Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; "Memorandum: League of Our Lady of Charity." Hispanic Apostolate 013/6 f. 1. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.



The Catholic organizations helped some refugees find employment when they entered the city, and many helped with the monthly bills while the family worked to support themselves.<sup>120</sup> Sacred Heart and the League of Our Lady of Charity worked together to develop a central place of operation for the league where Cubans could go to receive aid. When a temporary residence became vacant near the Sacred Heart church, the League moved its operations there. Once it were able to organize effectively, it began to create separate committees to help the refugees. A personal aid committee provided clothing and furniture, while an educational and information committee offered English classes four nights per week.<sup>121</sup>

In April of 1967, Archbishop Hallinan proclaimed the beginning of “Spanish Speaking Sunday,” which highlighted the contributions and importance of the Latino members of the Atlanta diocese.<sup>122</sup> By 1968, the Spanish speaking population of at least some of the parishes in Atlanta had sufficient numbers for the Archdiocese to call for Spanish catechists for the parishes. By that year at least 3,000 Latinos, overwhelmingly Cuban, could be found within these parishes, and the archdiocese worked to help them.<sup>123</sup>

The Catholic Archdiocese continued its efforts to help and work with the Cuban refugees into the 1970s. In 1971, a Spanish-speaking priest, Father Juan de la Cruz, was placed at Cathedral of Christ the King and began to celebrate Spanish mass. By the second half of the 1970s, some Catholic churches had become deeply involved with their work among Cuban parishioners. For example, Sacred Heart held special Spanish adult education classes. Sacred

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<sup>120</sup> “Memorandum: League of Our Lady of Charity.” Hispanic Apostolate 013/6 f. 1. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> “The History of the Hispanic Catholic People in the Archdiocese of Atlanta,” Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta; “*Walking Together: The Hispanic Pastor Plan of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. May 19, 1991*,” Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>123</sup> “Minutes of Meeting Held in Sacred Heart Assembly Room, October 18, 1961 to discuss Cuban Refugee Situation.” Folder: Catholic Social Services Latin American Resettlement Project 1961-1971 Council on Latin American Resettlement Members Correspondence. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

Heart also had a weekly mass and meetings for Latinos. It had a Latino-led spiritual-social theater group that met at the church, as well as a monthly Spanish language newspaper. This parish maintained a Spanish choir, ushers, lectors and a nursery for the Spanish mass. It celebrated two “fiestas” during the year, one of which was to celebrate Our Lady of Charity. They provided dual Holy Week services and bi-lingual services at other times, as well as English classes that were given at night.<sup>124</sup> Sacred Heart also provided its facilities for other celebrations such as quinceñera, a girl’s fifteenth birthday, which had part of its celebration in the church.<sup>125</sup>

The Catholic Church continued to assist the refugees who steadily came into the city during the late 1960s and 1970s. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the influx of Latinos shifted from Cubans to Central Americans, who continued to use the support services that had been originally set up to help the Cuban refugees. The Catholic Archdiocese continued to provide mass in Spanish in those parishes where Latinos made up a significant percentage of the membership.

During the 1960s, the religious community of Atlanta was extremely influential in the lives of the Cuban refugees. Both Cubans and Atlantans were able to organize themselves and meet the needs of the Cubans who came to the city. Both Protestant and Catholic churches worked with the newcomers to help them settle into the area and provide them support

The Catholic Archdiocese’s efforts evolved into a large-scale aid effort as it adjusted to the needs of the refugees. As Cubans arrived in Atlanta the majority of them went to the Catholic churches for aid which they found out about through word of mouth or the societies they joined.

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<sup>124</sup> “Sacred Heart Spanish Apostolate Memorandum, August 19, 1974. Hispanic Apostolate files 013/6 f. 1. Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

<sup>125</sup> *Organo Oficial de Acción Católica Hispanoamericana*,” Hispanic Apostolate Files 014/1 F.11 Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta; “Letter from Fr. Raphael L McDonald O.F.M. Resettlement Director Department of Immigration, U.S.C.C. to Immaculate Conception Church Atlanta, Georgia, ” Hispanic Apostolate Files 014/1 F.11, Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Archives, Atlanta.

The Archdiocese adapted its efforts to help them when they realized that what they had set up was not sufficient and whose structure would soon fall under the demand. A new office was formed and through it all aid was coordinated using the resources of its societies and the individual Americans and Cubans who volunteered to help.

The Protestant churches' work was largely based on sponsorship and involved a smaller population of refugees than the Catholics. Their aid was concentrated within a small number of churches that provided a start for families who otherwise would not have been able to leave Miami. The Protestant churches focused largely on the refugees that they sponsored while the Catholic Church dealt with giving aid to as many Catholic Cubans as they could.

Certain churches in the Atlanta area allowed Cubans to continue to hold on to their language and culture. By providing services in Spanish, churches allowed them to worship and continue to carry on their cultural religious practices. Cubans quickly became leaders in their respective churches and worked to help their countrymen when they came to the city. They worked along with the churches in starting the many aid societies that were put together to meet the needs of the refugees. The church became a place where the Cubans could come together during the week and join together for prayer meetings and social activities. Churches provided the space to conduct the Saturday school which was specifically started in order to make sure that the children would hold on to their Cuban culture.

Through all of these efforts, the Cuban community in Atlanta was able to continue to worship as they had at home, and in their own language. Cubans were accepted in some of the churches in Atlanta and from this acceptance refugees had a base of support through which they could continue cultural traditions. This base also provided Cuban refugees the opportunity to create a community network among them. Through the effort to help refugees on the part of Atlanta

churches as well as Cubans in the area, they were able to establish a sense of community among themselves in the city without the outside pressure to meld into the mainstream. As they worked to make Atlanta their home they began to create and become active in their community while working to shape the city to better serve their interests and needs. With this base to work from many became active in local Cuban affairs. Activists emerged and began working to better serve the interests and needs of the Cuban community.

### **Community and Activism**

Between the beginning of U.S. occupation of Cuba and the beginning of the First World War, trade between the two countries, already large, grew phenomenally. WWI created a sugar void that Cuba easily filled. The wealth that sugar brought to the island and the disruption of European trade also opened up new markets for North American businesses, especially those which sold consumer goods. This period saw a markedly stronger interest of U.S. firms in Cuba which shaped the island's mass culture of mass consumption while introducing American products as cultural icons.

One important United States export at a time when Cuba was redefining itself was American film. European film production was interrupted by WWI and left the Cuban market open for U.S. films to take hold. Going to the movies quickly became a favorite island pastime. North American production companies opened up their own theaters on the island. To the lament of some, movies took the place of the Cuban theater. In some areas, theaters were actually turned into movie theaters. The love of movies spread from Havana into the interior where makeshift viewing areas were set up at sugar mills and local meeting places. The popularity of North American films changed the way a whole generation of Cubans formulated their sense of self. As Louis A Pérez explains, “motion pictures fostered an understanding of ways and things North American and became one of the principal means to presume familiarity with the United States.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Louis A Pérez Jr, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*. (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 305.

With film came other North American products, and improvements were fueled or expanded on by an influx of consumerism and the sugar industry. Railroads were built to transport goods and sugar to and from Havana. Telephone and electric lines were run from the United States to Cuba. Roads in the interior were built to facilitate the sugar industry. American cars were brought to the island. The Cuban way of life was being changed by these American imports. Soon Cubans began to compare themselves to North Americans and used them as a “frame of reference and source of validation.”<sup>127</sup> They learned English and mixed English names for items in with their Spanish. Some changed their names to make them sound more American. Many closely followed the trends in North American style, and many clothing stores imported American clothes.

After the Second World War, Cuban identity formation had been infused with a steady dose of North American culture during a period of rapid cultural change. In so doing it was difficult for some to differentiate what was Cuban and what was American because to be Cuban at times was based on imported American social values. Pérez shows that “much of what served as the basis of Cuban life-what governed conduct and conventions, what influenced habits and hobbies, behaviors and mannerisms-was derived from North American sources. U.S. holidays and commemorative dates were observed in Cuba. Mothers’ Day was adopted almost immediately... Christmas assumed the appearance of the holiday in the North at almost every turn. . . .”<sup>128</sup> While identifying with a glamorized sense of what it meant to be American while in Cuba, refugees found themselves questioning their own identity when they began living in the United States.

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<sup>127</sup> Louis A Perez Jr, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*. (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 351.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

Exile in Atlanta was another opportunity for Cubans to recreate themselves. Already familiar with the concept of what it meant to be American in Cuba, they had to work on what it meant to them to be Cuban and Cuban American in the United States. In doing so they found what was important to them. Some set up businesses that imported Cuban culture to Atlanta; others became involved in counterrevolutionary groups while others began to work towards bettering the conditions in Atlanta. In this time of adversity, Cubans fell back on their old Cuban identity while reinventing their sense of self, and as they became more secure in their environment, they became more active in their community.

### ***Community Formation***

By 1966, Atlanta's newspapers discussed "Atlanta's Cuban Colony," referring to the visible organization of a Cuban community structure even though there was not a concentration of Cubans in any one area. They were adept at finding ways to get together as well as share pertinent information with each other despite this visible dispersment. One place they found conducive to this activity was the Cuban-owned business. Some Cubans set up businesses similar to the ones they owned on the island, or to meet needs they saw were not met by local businesses in Atlanta. The establishment of local Cuban-owned businesses was important in the strengthening of a Cuban network. One of these was Artime's market, a business that grew from a supermarket on wheels into a thriving store. Mario Artime and his wife left Cuba in 1956, before Castro's revolution. Like other Cubans, they traveled back and forth between the island and Atlanta until Castro took control. By 1966 his family had already brought to Atlanta his mother, a sister, and a brother from Cuba.<sup>129</sup>

Artime's market was borne out of the work he had already been doing in the community in providing refugees products with which they were familiar. A refugee remembers, "Mario

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<sup>129</sup> "Atlanta's Cuban Colony." *Atlanta Constitution*. 18 September 1966.

Arttime had a little car and he would go to Miami and bring all these goodies and Latin stuff. He would go around to individual homes and sell these things. Then later he developed a small place on Peachtree Street near Tenth. He opened up a little shop there so people could go over there instead of him having to travel all over the place. ” Alfredo Ledon, a refugee from Cuba, also remembers Arttime and his traveling grocery store. “My wife was a good cook. There were some things at the beginning that we didn't have that we had in Cuba. But then there was a Cuban person who started bringing some things from Miami and selling here. He continued doing that for some time then he opened a grocery and put all of these things in the store. So we went to his grocery to buy whatever we needed. ”<sup>130</sup> This little grocery store held items with which any Atlantan would be familiar. However, mixed amongst American products were products familiar to Cubans. Arttime brought in items such as plantains, mangos, guavas, and papaya. He also sold Latin American label coffees and canned foods that reportedly gave the store “the air of a Spanish delicatessen. ” It was not, however, the search for the exotic that brought his customers to him but the quest for the familiar. The majority of Arttime's customers were Cuban. Refugees entered Atlanta and did not easily find the products needed to cook the foods they were used to. Through businesses such as Arttime's grocery as well as other food stores that would open up in the following years, Cubans were given the means to cook the favorite dishes that allowed them to hold onto their sense of self and identity of being Cuban.

While refugees were focused on creating new homes and starting new lives in Atlanta they did not lose sight of the situation their friends and families had to endure in Cuba. While coming to terms with their exile, Cubans began forming political and social groups where they could join together and support each other during this time of uncertainty. Most who left early expected to return after the United States stepped in to return things to the way they used to be.

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<sup>130</sup> Alfredo Ledon, interview by author, digital recording, Atlanta, GA. 28 March 2001.



They believed that “the United States would eventually lose patience with the new order in Cuba and, as so often in the past, intervene to set things right.”<sup>131</sup> These groups also fed their need to do what they could to help free their island of Castro. The Cuban community was very politically active in Cuban affairs as well as affairs of Cubans in Atlanta.

The younger Cubans who attended universities in the area were just as politically active as the adults, especially the students at Georgia Tech. Cuban students at Georgia Tech became involved in anti-Castro activities during the early 1960s. There were Cubans in attendance when refugees began arriving in Atlanta, as Georgia Tech had had a steady attendance of students from Cuba since the 1920s. Most of them believed they could not return home and feared for their families’ lives on the island. Many would decline to offer their names when interviewed for fear that their families would be hurt in some manner in retribution for their statements. Consequently, many of the Cuban students at Georgia Tech formed a group from which they organized anti-Castro activities.<sup>132</sup>

For some of the students, anti-Castro work became more militant when they joined the Bay of Pigs invasion. Beginning in January of 1961, Cuban male students began disappearing from campus. By April of that year, about fourteen students had left the campus for Miami to join the rebel forces to invade Cuba. Soon after the failed invasion, Tech students got together to start their own drive to help the one being held nationwide to meet Castro's ransom demands and help free the eight Georgia Tech students who had been captured and jailed during the invasion. The students put bottles up all over campus in an effort to help bring back their captured

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<sup>131</sup> Louis A Perez Jr, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*. (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 500.

<sup>132</sup> “Cubans Here Join Anti-Castro Move” *Atlanta Journal*, 21 November 1960; “Cubans Here Flock to Join Rebels” *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 April 1961.

friends.<sup>133</sup> Cubans continued their involvement and interest in affairs of the island. Just as the students in the city had done, the refugees living in Atlanta began creating organizations and groups. These facilitated their need to stay involved in activities that concerned Cuban issues in the city as well as on the island. Through these groups refugees were able to join together in activities that ranged from cultural observances to fundraising for anti-Castro operations.

The Cuban Freedom Committee (CFC) was chartered in October of 1962 as a non-profit organization by a group of Cubans and Atlantans. It worked to make its members active in local politics as well as American-Cuba relations. In addition the club worked to serve as a source of information on the Cuban problem and “serve the Cuban refugees by helping them become responsible, solvent, members of the American community.” Committee members hoped that they would be able to effectively spread anti-Castro and anti-communist propaganda in order to have American sentiment against Castro rise and in effect cause the United States government to end Castro’s rule.<sup>134</sup>

The committee combined Cuban political observances with American celebrations. On February 24, 1963 the CFC held a rally of Cuban exiles. Its purpose was to jointly celebrate two national holidays: George Washington’s birthday and Grito de Baire, a remembrance of the day of the beginning of the Cuban War of Independence from Spain in 1895. Over 100 families joined together to attend that day. They chose to celebrate Washington’s birthday as well as to show their “gratitude of the Hospitality of the people of the United States toward Cuban exiles

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<sup>133</sup> “8 From Tech Held in Cuba, Fund Raised”. *Atlanta Constitution*. 24 May 1961; “Firm Here Contributed \$37,554 to Ransom”. *Atlanta Constitution*. 8 January 1963; “Atlantans Waiting For Cubans’ Return” *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 December 1962; “Cubans Launched Drive to Ransom Prisoners From Recent Invasion” *The Technique* 26 May 1961.

<sup>134</sup> “Electoral Procedures,” Cuban Freedom Committee, 11/13/1964, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Letter to Victor Citarella from Julio Ramirez” 14 October 1963, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Alpha 66 meeting” 3/24/1963, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Cuban Freedom Committee Candidate List,” Cuban Freedom Committee, 15 December 1963, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Notice of Cuban Freedom Committee Charter,” Cuban Freedom Committee, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Cuban-Aid group Gets Charter Here” *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 October 1962.

and refugees.” The power of this group came as much from the coming together of refugees as it did from its activities.<sup>135</sup>

The CFC worked through the participation of its members. As the group held activities around town one of their aims was to increase the local awareness of their group and attract new members. The CFC explained that one of its purposes was “to provide a place of gathering of Cuban refugees which would serve as a source of recreation, news from home, and information on jobs, schools and housing.” The Committee organized parties and gatherings throughout the year. One gathering was the “Fiesta Cubana” or the Cuban party, which they held at the Henry Grady Hotel. Cuban members and their friends and family attended these gatherings making it possible for Cubans to meet with other refugees in the city and strengthen the networks that had formed among them. As one refugee remembers, “At that time people got to know each other well, even though these meetings were sporadic. People got to know each other and talk to them and they would call each other when there was a meeting or something else going on.”<sup>136</sup>

The Cuban Freedom Committee was one of the first non- religious organizations to emerge among the refugees. It became one of the building blocks of an interlocking network of social and political support groups in the city. The CFC as well as other groups that would emerge within the community worked with each other, and their memberships overlapped. Cubans attended the meetings of the Catholic Action Group just as often as they did those of the CFC as well as other social groups.

The Cuban refugees met at any gathering they could and the political, social and cultural attributes of all the groups they belonged to became blurred during the activities they held. Many

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<sup>135</sup> “Letter to Americans” Cuban Freedom Committee Inc of Georgia, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Regulations of the Cuban Freedom Committee,” Cuban Freedom Committee, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Rally of Cuban Exiles,” Cuban Freedom Committee, 24 February 1963 Raul Trujillo Private Collection; “Press Release No. 1,” Cuban Freedom Committee, 24 February 1963, Raul Trujillo Private Collection.

<sup>136</sup> Raul Trujillo, interview by author, 6 April 2001.

times celebrations were held to honor Cuban heroes or holidays but were also fundraisers for anti-Castro groups. Social and political groups collaborated on these gatherings, bringing together all of their members, many who were members of each club.

From the very beginning of their existence in Atlanta, Cubans became very active in funding groups whose aim was to overthrow Castro and fundraising parties were very productive for this cause. In October of 1964 Cuban exiles held a “Cuban Fiesta”<sup>137</sup> to raise funds to donate to “the exile cause.” The proceeds were collected from contributions given by the 375 people who attended the fundraiser. It was organized by exiles in the city who were actively working toward the overthrow of Castro. In December of 1966, Cuban exiles and their supporters gathered for a fundraiser, held at the Henry Grady Hotel. Reportedly 500 people attended this event. They sat around the Sip and Dip Lounge while being entertained by Cuban musician Gonzalo Bean. During that night supporters raised \$1,000 to help fund the Cuban Liberation Army. Organizers worked towards the goal of \$300,000. “It’ll take a lot of these parties to do that,” explained one organizer.<sup>138</sup> A refugee who attended the party remembers, “We had big parties there, The Henry Grady Hotel. I remember that it was a huge party, a dance party. It was down in the ballroom downstairs. They had a swimming pool in the center and tables all around. It was a very fun thing to be there. It was a special shindig for that time.”<sup>139</sup>

Refugees regularly observed Cuban holidays. In 1965 exiles organized an event that would pay homage to Cuban hero Jose Martí. Martí was a leader in Cuba’s fight to free itself from Spain. He died in 1895 during a skirmish with the Spanish Army during the war. The gathering was held at Emory University in Atlanta. It featured speeches from Richard Starr, who

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<sup>137</sup> “Cuban Exile Says Fiesta Big Success.” *Atlanta Journal*, 20 October 1966.

<sup>138</sup> “For the Cause.” *Atlanta Journal*. 5 December 1966.

<sup>139</sup> Raul Trujillo, interview by author, 6 April 2001.

specialized in the study of Communism, and Dr. Julio Duarte, a refugee who made a presentation on the advent of Communism in Cuba.<sup>140</sup>

In May of 1966, exiles gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Cuban republic. This event also welcomed new refugees to the city and got them acquainted with other Cubans in the city. The patriotic event started with the Cuban and United State national anthems, followed by music and poetry which was mostly created by Cubans in exile. One such performance was made by the twenty-member Cuban Chorus of Atlanta of “Ode to Cuba” composed by Enrique Chia, a popular musician in exile from Cuba. They also performed “lament” which was written by Lydia Andrews, a Cuban refugee and wife of an American businessman. During the event, it was announced that there was an unconfirmed exile raid on a Cuban coastal area the day before which brought strong applause. Two groups, CRECED (Cuban Representation in Exile) and the Cuban Freedom Committee, cosponsored this event. During the event a spokesperson announced that the Cuban Freedom Committee would offer economic aid to CRECED. According to spokesman Ramon Cernuda, CRECED’s main objective at the time was “to keep alive the hopes of return to (their) fatherland and cooperating at all times with all possible resources with those revolutionary organizations engaged in ousting Castro’s dictatorial and Communist regime.”<sup>141</sup>

In the late 1970s a group of Cubans started a social club called the Cuban Club of Atlanta. This club, which was chartered in 1977, was put together by Cubans in the area who wanted a group that would represent them as well as bring them all together in a cultural and social setting. The first president of the club, Orlando Rojas, remembers the creation of the club:

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<sup>140</sup> “Cubans to Honor Hero at Emory Fete.” *Atlanta Journal*, 17 May 1965.

<sup>141</sup> “Exiles Gather, Long for Cuba,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 May 1966.

I had just returned from vacationing in Myrtle Beach and I was filled with enthusiasm. That night I brought together my closest friends which were the ones I first met in Atlanta. We knew each other from meeting in church, parties we had at our houses and at other places like night clubs where we gathered together to dance. That night I read to them a letter I titled “First letter in Atlanta” in which I demonstrated the necessity to reunite all of the Cubans in Atlanta. I also emphasized the need for us to perpetuate our customs and our culture.<sup>142</sup>

Through the tenacity of the original members, the Cuban Club was a success. They started off with a number of big parties. The induction of the first 100 members was held at the Capitol City Country Club, and at the Atlanta Civic Center, they had a wine and cheese party. The club soon had three different softball teams. They also had chess and domino competitions. The club continued to host such events and became popular among the Cuban community. While they gave these parties and hosted events, many of them were also observances of Cuban political holidays. The singing of the Cuban national anthem began many of their dinners. As one member explains, “We observe our patriotic holidays, and honor our heroes, we dance to our music and we gather together to eat Cuban food.”<sup>143</sup>

Groups such as the Cuban Freedom Committee continued their political work and lobbying. The Cuban Freedom Committee was especially sensitive to how Americans perceived the situation in Cuba. On October 30, 1967 television station WGTV of Athens aired a program sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education called “Report from Cuba,” filmed by a documentary team from KQED-TV San Francisco. The program began with a documentary about Cuba and was followed by a discussion among professors from the University of Georgia. This program outraged Cubans living in Atlanta and Milledgeville. They protested the airing of the “communist propaganda” that “defended the regime of misery, prisons and slavery.” The

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<sup>142</sup> “Cuban Club History”, Cuban Club of Atlanta, 1994, Guillermo M. Merlo Personal Collection.

<sup>143</sup> “Cuban Club Party Program”, Cuban Club of Atlanta. Guillermo M. Merlo Personal Collection; *Mundo Hispánico*, 25 September 1997; *El Deportivo* 5 February 1998.

Cuban Freedom Committee began a crusade against this program, which had been endorsed by the United States Department of Education to be shown on public television countrywide.

Refugees started a letter writing campaign to Senator Richard B. Russell, as well as the Department of Education. CFC president Raul Trujillo wrote to Governor Lester Maddox to bring the matter to his attention and to request the opportunity to remedy the situation.

Trujillo wrote:

The undersigners believe that the special program about Cuba broadcasted by Channel 8, so called 'Educational TV', was a mockery of the Cuban tragedy and showed no respect for the thousands of Cubans in exile and the millions inside the Island who suffer the oppression and day after day calamities of living under a totalitarian Communist regime.

We feel that any one familiar with the Cuban tragedy will agree in describing this program as maliciously and purposefully oriented toward misleading the public opinion. The broadcasting of this type of program favoring and even praising the enemies of this country, the same ones that are killing American soldiers in Viet Nam, through an educational TV network, financed by the government of Georgia, is definitely an act of treachery to the American Democracy.

It is for the sake of democracy that we all plead to you for an opportunity of equal time on the same broadcasting station in which to expose the truth about the atrocity to which Cubans have been submitted under the Communist regime and the real truth of what goes on inside Communist Cuba.<sup>144</sup>

Governor Maddox answered Trujillo with a non-committal response. The Cubans did, however, receive airtime to rebut the earlier program. A group of Cubans appeared on WGTV in November of 1967 with reporter Tom Dunkin as the moderator. The program titled, "The Other Face of Cuba, Rebuttal" began with a presentation on Cuba followed by a discussion on the conditions on the island.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> "Letter to Governor Lester Maddox from Raul Trujillo," 6 November 1967, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; "Letter to Cuban Community," 22 November 1967, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; "NET's Cuban Report Criticized," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 November 1967.

<sup>145</sup> "Letter to Dr. William Hale from Raul Trujillo," 13 December 1967, Raul Trujillo Private Collection; "Letter to Raul Trujillo from Lester Maddox," 5 December 1967, Raul Trujillo Private Collection.

Just as Cubans began to demand that their exile not be denigrated, they too demanded that the social problems refugees faced be addressed. Cubans continued to come to Atlanta, and the increasing numbers of refugees in the city began to magnify the social problems that all refugees faced. By the 1970s, the refugee situation had begun to change. Refugees in Atlanta began to work aggressively to bring extended family members to the city. Also, many went to Atlanta after learning of it from people they knew who lived there and aid workers in other cities. Many who had been in Atlanta for at least a decade felt confident enough to demand good living conditions and jobs for both themselves and their fellow refugees. In October of 1971, community leaders held a meeting at Inman Elementary School. It was called “Meeting de la Comunidad Cubana” or the Cuban Community Meeting. This meeting, organized by Latino community leaders and Economic Opportunity Atlanta Inc., was considered “the first step toward breaking the language – enforced isolation that has kept Spanish- speaking Atlantans out of the mainstream of life here.”<sup>146</sup> The focus of the meeting was to show how the language barrier has made it hard for many refugees to make a living in the city. Eladio Perez, a refugee who had taught Spanish grammar in Havana, summed up the problems refugees faced as “language, the lack of opportunities, and inability to drive cars.”<sup>147</sup> The language barrier, he said, “prevents Latin Americans from getting better jobs, making American friends, even reading newspapers.”<sup>148</sup> Free English classes were being given at this time, but many were unavailable to go to them because of transportation problems to class sites. For those who did not know English, getting a drivers license was tough. They were most times unable to pay for driver’s classes, and self-instruction was impossible for those who could not read the English instruction

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<sup>146</sup> “Cubans Plan Meeting on Problems Here,” *Atlanta Journal*, 28 October 1971.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.



manuals or take the English written test. Along with the inability to find good paying jobs, refugees complained of overcrowding and poor housing conditions.<sup>149</sup>

Despite the increasing pressure put on the city by Cubans to find a solution to the problem of a language barrier, conditions did not immediately change. In 1977 a collaborative study by the Latin American Association and Georgia State University documented the need of social services for Spanish speakers. The study showed that more Spanish speakers, 80% of them Cuban, needed a location to go to that would provide English classes as well as information on social services, translation services, and legal advocates.<sup>150</sup> Catholic Social Services also stepped up its services for non-English speakers who came to the agency for help by training their counselors in Spanish.<sup>151</sup>

The heightened awareness of the needs of the Latinos in Atlanta, the majority of whom in 1979 were still Cuban, brought about the creation of several other community needs studies. The largest of these was commissioned by the Atlanta Regional Commission and conducted by the Urban Life Center at Georgia State University.<sup>152</sup> The study reported that the composite Hispanic family of Atlanta was Cuban and underemployed. They spoke Spanish 80% of the time and lived in Fulton or DeKalb County. Their communities were scattered and small, and their residence depended on what phase they were in at the time. Newcomers generally moved to a cluster in the Grant Park area, Midtown around Ponce de Leon, or Doraville. As they found stable jobs and looked for new places to live, they moved to Cheshire Bridge or Buckhead near Broadview Plaza. Broadview also was the first place of residence half of the time. Seventy percent of them moved at least once. As they became more affluent, they made their permanent homes in Toco

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<sup>149</sup> "Cubans Plan Meeting on Problems Here," *Atlanta Journal*, 28 October 1971.

<sup>150</sup> "Atlanta, the Melting Pot," *Atlanta Journal*, 25 September 1977.

<sup>151</sup> "Refugees Assisted Over Language Barrier," *Atlanta Journal*, 27 October 1977.

<sup>152</sup> "Hispanic Study Focuses on Needs," *Atlanta Journal*, 15 February 1979.

Hills, Chamblee, or the Briar cliff Road area. The most affluent dispersed throughout Northwest and Central DeKalb and the surrounding counties of Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton.

The problems many of the community leaders complained about were well founded. The report found that most service agencies in Atlanta did not have bilingual or bicultural personnel. Also, because of the language barrier, people such as landlords were taking advantage of them and providing sub-standard housing. Many service needs were seriously lacking for Latinos in Atlanta, such as housing assistance and the availability of drivers-license handbooks and tax forms in Spanish.

The city government and local businesses slowly began to recognize the influence refugees had had on the city. The language barrier was extremely unsettling for refugees when they had to deal with the police or firemen. In 1979, Mayor Maynard Jackson put his Cuban-born press secretary, Angelo Fuster, in charge of closing the gap between Spanish speakers and city government officials. The fire and police departments began to actively recruit Latinos. The mayor's office also put together an ad hoc advisory task force with the Department of Safety to deal with the concerns of the Hispanic community and to provide cultural awareness classes for city workers.<sup>153</sup> The abundance of Spanish spoken on Atlanta's streets did not go unnoticed by Atlantan businesses. Some began to market toward the growing Latino population. Gift stores began to provide cards in Spanish. Blue-light specials were announced in Spanish in some stores. Banks began to hire bilingual tellers. Public schools began to offer bilingual classes for both children and adults. Radio stations began carrying international newscasts and music hours in Spanish.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> "Police Bureau Seeking Hispanics," *Atlanta Journal*, 14 February 1979.

<sup>154</sup> "40,000 Hispanics Make Their Mark on Atlanta," *Atlanta Journal*, 15 February 1979.

By the end of the 1970s, Atlanta had begun its journey toward becoming a multi-cultural city. Cubans became increasingly active politically and socially. Their activism began focused on Cuban affairs tied to the island; however, these activities began to shift to Cuban interests in the city. It would take almost a decade for the city to notice that many of the refugees' needs were not being met by city organizations. However, by the late 1970s the city began to make its offices and services more accessible to Spanish speakers. This was undoubtedly invaluable for the massive influx of Cubans who would arrive in the 1980s and for the Central and South Americans who were attracted to the area in the next decade as well.

While North American ideals were not foreign to Cubans, living in America with the prospect of never returning “home” changed their view of the world. They did not slip easily and seamlessly into the population even though most were very familiar with American culture. The United States as their home was much different than the romanticized country they saw in the movies or experienced on their trips or short stays at school. One refugee who went to Georgia Tech in the fall to meet a friend recalled, “I saw all these leaves on the ground and said what in the world is this? I remember clearly in my mind about that feeling, it was a very interesting, a very good feeling, really something that I never experienced before.”<sup>155</sup> Refugees would have to experience many new things while trying to make a place for themselves in their new city, and in doing so, paved the way for the new immigrants who would soon find themselves in Atlanta.

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<sup>155</sup> Trujillo Interview.

## Conclusion

In order to understand why Cubans chose Atlanta when they sought refuge one needs to understand the relationship between both places. Georgians and Cubans were in close contact with each other before 1900. Cubans were attracted to Georgia before the 1900s. They opened and worked in businesses in the state, including the cigar industries on the coast and in Atlanta. Many Atlantans first encountered Cuba through their participation in the Spanish-Cuban-American War. After the war, both cities marketed their vacation spots and businesses to each other. Cubans not only vacationed and worked with Atlantans but also sent their children to area schools. Athletic contests, over the years, helped them form friendships with local families and become familiar with their host cities.

Cubans that first left Cuba were those who had the means to do so and the most to lose. The first wave of refugees was made up of mostly the white upper and middle classes. They left the island because they immediately understood that with Castro came changes that they were not willing to accept or felt they would not survive. Louis A. Perez explains:

Exile was the obvious option. But the fact that it was obvious does not mean that it was easy. It was not, nor does the fact that almost all of the early emigration represented self-imposed exile mean that departure was without heartache. The most susceptible to emigration were the people who had been most effectively integrated into North American structures and whose belief system prevented them from fully comprehending the implications of the changes they were experiencing.<sup>156</sup>

This largely left the refugee experience to the upper classes in the beginning. Cubans that had been to Atlanta before the revolution were those who had the means to visit. They had the money to travel to Atlanta for vacations or to send their children to school there. They were the

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<sup>156</sup> On Becoming Cuban. 500.

businessmen who had the ability to branch out to their peers in the area. They were the country club members who participated in the Havatlanta games. Consequently, the refugees that first made it to Atlanta were largely from the upper and middle classes and had had professional careers on the island.

The social class and appearance of the Cuban refugee in Atlanta during the 1960s facilitated an easier acceptance by people in the area. Atlanta was evolving racially and had the first groups of refugees been from the lower classes and darker skinned they potentially could have dealt with a lot more resistance in the area. If the refugees went to Atlanta with no contact and no familiarity with the area or at least the United States, the process could have taken a different course as well. As it was, it was hard for people in the city to spot a Cuban refugee. The majority of them were white, and many knew some English. The only defining characteristic would have been their accents. Overall, refugees had a plan of action for when they made it to Atlanta. They had people they knew or family they could stay with. Some had jobs lined up through friends before they got there. Others took whatever job they could find while they got settled. However, most needed aid that could not be met solely by their families or friends.

Religious institutions were an important part of the refugees' life. They not only became a place of worship but a place where they could meet other Cubans and find information on jobs and resources. In some churches, Cubans created religious-based support groups that gave them a means to organize themselves and create a forum for refugees to become more involved in church activities while creating a small Cuban network. In time, there was a sizable group of refugees in a group of churches, most of them Catholic. As the congregations worked to help refugees get settled in the area, they realized that there was a larger need for aid and created groups that would help them in different areas of need. Some would help find clothing; others,

jobs and places to live. Soon these groups, like the refugees' families and friends, found that they could not sustain their work as individual people or institutions. In an attempt to meet this need, the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta organized to set up an aid society that brought together the disconnected aid work its members had been involved in.

Cuban refugees were very adept at organizing their community through the social and political groups they created through businesses they opened. The first groups they were involved in were founded in churches. As the refugees became more organized, a few branched out and began their own groups, all of which worked with one another and most times shared membership. Cubans also opened up businesses that catered to their needs. These businesses, as well as the groups and clubs, were used by refugees to connect with each other and find community information. The groups and the businesses gave a cohesive feeling to a community that was scattered throughout the city

During the late 1970s, Cuban community activists began to call for better services for Spanish speakers and refugees who continued to travel to Atlanta as their families, already established in the city, began to send for them from Cuba. By this time the number of refugees needing aid necessitated assistance from local government and state resources. Many of the services that were needed were not being provided or not available to those who did not speak English. Members of the Atlantan Cuban community began to work to help make this aid available. They lobbied for Spanish drivers' license tests and Spanish speakers at offices refugees needed to use. Activists fought for better living conditions and stricter rules for landlords who rented rooms and apartments to refugees. By the end of the decade, many changes had been made to the way Georgia government provided aid to Spanish speakers in the area.

It is important to understand the evolution and changes made for Spanish speakers not only in local government but in the city itself. Before Cubans came to the city en masse there was a small group of Latinos living in Atlanta, the majority of whom spoke English and were well established there. Atlanta was not ready to meet the needs of the non-English speaking refugee. There were no Spanish speakers in the welfare departments or offices that refugees needed to visit for assistance. English classes were not available; driving tests were only given in English; and, there were no church services given in Spanish. By the 1980s, this had changed. Spanish speakers had resources available to them, and they could communicate with people in their native language until they were able to learn English through classes given throughout the city. All of these services were used by the Latinos who arrived in the 1980s, including an influx of Cubans that came at the same time as well. Had Cuban refugees not created a need for these services twenty years earlier, Atlanta would not have had the resources in place to deal with the large number of Central and South Americans who were attracted to the area.

Cuban refugees who entered the city in the 1980s are absent from this work because they deserve to be studied separately. The characteristics of their arrival and their experiences were distinctly different than those of earlier refugees. Not only did a large group of them make their way to Atlanta, but a large group of detainees were sent to the Federal penitentiary in the city, which caused a surge of activism and protest by Cubans in the area. Refugees at this time were part of the Mariel boat lift which resulted from an agreement between Castro and the U.S. government. It opened up immigration from Cuba to America. At the same time, Castro opened his jails and asylums, and soon it was found that many of the refugees were criminal or dangerous. They were also largely Afro-Cuban and from the lower classes which touched on race and cultural biases in the United States. This issue deserves to be treated on its own in a

future work that concentrates on the impact the detainees as well as the Marielitos had on the city as well as the Cuban community.

Sadly the wealth of information on the Cuban/Atlantan experience is still tucked away in closets and under beds. All one needs to do is reach out to find it, as I did early one spring Sunday at the Cuban Club of Atlanta. As I entered the club a group of older gentlemen who were exuding a gentility of ages past greeted me with open arms. As I waited, I watched the groups of men and women talking excitedly as they got caught up on the past weeks' events. The smell of coffee filled the room as a group of women sat drinking their cortaditos and cafecitos. Cuban-accented Spanish buzzed and bounced off the walls.

After a few minutes, the man I came to meet appeared. He was old and grey but full of life as was everyone there. He had a twinkle in his eye that sparkled when he introduced me to his friends. He showed me a room with a stage and a group of girls practicing a traditional dance. They were preparing for one of the many parties held there each year. We walked through a small library with an impressive collection of books. He bragged about the large number of books on Cuba they had there as he joked with the group of men playing dominos in the room. Finally, we entered the cafeteria where he treated me to a wonderful meal of rice and beans along with some other Cuban specialties. For the next hour, he told me of his life in Cuba and his struggles in Atlanta. He told me about the Cuban Club and how important it was to his community. He then introduced me to everyone in the room, a mixed group of three generations of Cubans. As I prepared to leave, I took a picture with the old man and we gave each other a kiss goodbye. While there I felt that I had left Atlanta for a while and had been transported to an old Cuba where all its members could relax and feel at home. Its building was not only a place to find comfort and companionship; it stood as a reminder for what was left behind and what could



never be forgotten. It is a reminder of the sacrifice and suffering that was endured while looking for and creating a new home.

As I backed out of my parking space, I left my old man waving and smiling, his eyes full of dreams and memories full of stories and experiences too voluminous for an afternoon. Like most of the people I met that day, the repository of the most important information on the Cuban experience was his heart and his mind. Unfortunately, his life was not recorded before he slipped into his dream world of palm trees. He now flies free in the air through his palmed oasis and plays dominos with his old friends, waiting for more to come.

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